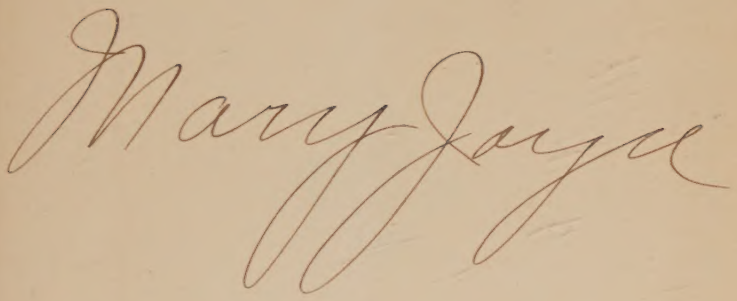
Lights Up

By GRACE S. RICHMOND


Mary Joyce

LIGHTS UP

By GRACE S. RICHMOND

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"Cherry Square," "A Court of Inquiry," "Rufus," "Foursquare," "Red and Black," "Strawberry Acres," "Round the Corner in Gay Street," "Red Pepper Burns," "With Juliet in England," "The Second Violin," "The Twenty-fourth of June," "Under Country Skies," "Red of the Redfields," "The Brown Study," "Indifference of Juliet," "Mrs. Red Pepper," "Red Pepper Patients," etc.

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TO

MY YOUNGER DAUGHTER

JEAN RICHMOND MacWHINNEY

WHO, AS A MEMBER OF THE "YOUNGER GENERATION," HAS BEEN AN INTERESTED, INSPIRING, AND QUITE MERCILESS CRITIC OF THIS TALE

LIGHTS UP

I

JOAN DARE, looking as though all the winds of heaven had been buffeting her, rode Patsy down the lane and in at the garden gate. Joan was bareheaded—her riding hat under her arm, as it mostly was when she got away from the more congested motor routes—and her chestnut hair, a shining natural loveliness that no hairdresser ever achieved with iron, was a mop upon her head. Her well-tailored brown habit was splashed with mud, and Patsy's flanks were covered with it. But her tanned cheeks were rich with gypsy-like colour, her lips red with the sting of the cold March rain that had lately touched them in a passing shower, and her spirits were sky-high.

She and Patsy went into the barn at a canter, and stopped.

"Miss Joan! Ye've not been down again?"

"Me and the Prince of Wales! No, Jenky, we just slipped a bit and caught our balance again, right as rain. The road's pretty muddy. Give him a good rub-

down, eh? I had to keep him standing full ten minutes, back at the corner, chinning with one I didn't much care to chin with."

"So Patsy hasn't been down. Hm-m!" Jenkins eyed the brown flanks distrustfully. "Just sittin' by the roadside, I suppose."

Joan laughed. "What would you have?" she questioned. "A ride without incident?"

She ran into the house. It was a rambling old brown stone house, set in the corner of a country crossroads, so close to the roadside within its high hedge that it looked as if it were for ever ready to note all that went by. Behind it lay a small garden, and behind that a small orchard and the brown vine-covered barn that housed not only Patsy and Nick, the horses, but Seraphina, a pure-bred Jersey; Blimp, a police dog; Mike, an Irish setter; and Lad, a young Airedale. Also, a long, rakish-looking roadster of a blue-gray shininess, in a walled-off seclusion of its own, so that it wouldn't reek with stable odours.

The house from without possessed much charm; it had the look of an English country house, unpretentious but well conceived. Inside it was—well, it was Joan's home, and it had been lived in by people who had been everywhere about the world. The sense of this met one at the door. At all the doors, as a matter of fact. The Dares, husband and wife, had delighted in the old stone flagging that led into the

kitchen; in the back entry; in the latticed side porch; in the lantern-lit front entrance with its heavy, dark lintels. Before they went away to Paris, early in January, for this latest year of work there, Madelaine Dare, Joan's mother, who was a painter of portraits and had made something of a name for herself, had said to Morton Dare, her father, who was a sculptor not without renown, "No matter where we go, Mort, it's something to know there's always this to come back to, isn't it?"

He had nodded his handsome head, raising one slender artist's hand to the lintel, rubbed smooth with years. "Especially this year, with Joan back here to keep it for us," he said. "Sure you'll not let it burn down, Johnny? You know you're a trifle reckless with the matches."

"I'll take care of Crossways," she promised, "for you."

The house had seemed empty without them for a time. But she was so used to having them away, or to being away herself, and so fully in accord with their ideas of life and accomplishment, that she settled down to the year she had chosen to live through by herself, in the brown house behind the hedge, without a moment of doubt but that she could do with it what she would, and find plenty with which to occupy every hour.

Coming in from the ride in the March wind with

its spatter of rain, her first act was to take up the telephone and get New York. A ticket for a play for the coming evening was her demand from a theatre agency, and after some parleying she succeeded. New York was more than thirty miles away, and there were no trains from the mile-distant village that made satisfactory connections with theatre hours, either going or coming, in the city. What of that, with a more than capable roadster feeling its oats in the brown barn?

A quick bath; chestnut hair no longer a mop but a gleaming, close-fitting cap for the small head that bore it; a sleek, dark frock that was evening dress enough for an unaccompanied young woman in an orchestra seat; over all, a fur-lined dark coat and a tight little hat worn well down over the deep blue eyes that were all but black in the shadow of dark lashes. Joan came down to dinner with her hat on and her coat over her arm, fully prepared for Mrs. Hopper's gentle remonstrance.

This Mrs. Hopper was Joan's housekeeper and dragon. Dragon was what Joan called her, when she didn't address her as Hoppy. Madelaine Dare had agreed, at first reluctantly, then with her own charming complaisance, when Joan had insisted that Mrs. Hopper could play both rôles.

"She looks the part pretty well, Joan. But—her English isn't quite up to it, do you think?"

"I don't think that matters, do you—really, dearest? Hoppy's quite stunning in her blacks and grays, and nobody notices dragons much, anyhow. I sha'n't have to take her out anywhere. She'll only have to shake hands and smile sweetly when any man comes, ask him how he does, and then fade nicely away. She can do that—she really has quite a manner. Anyhow, I can't dream of having Aunt Olivia here all the while. She's a lamb and I love her, but—just having her always around—noticing—having to talk to her, and—oh, you know! I couldn't work half as well, and neither could you."

"I admit that, dear. Very well, I'll be satisfied with Hoppy, who has really a good deal of character. Only you'll have to dress her."

"Love it. And of course I'll have Aunt Olivia for any week-end parties or special occasions when I think you'd prefer it."

Mother and daughter understood each other. It was a delightful and somewhat unusual relationship, that between Madelaine Dare and Joan her daughter.

So now Joan, hurriedly swallowing her dinner, and jumping up after a glance at her watch, stated her case casually:

"Running into town—in the car—for a play. Back fairly late yet fairly early, just as one looks at it. Please leave the night latch on."

"Miss Joan! Surely you're not driving in alone again?"

"Why not? It's great fun. There'll be few on the road on a March night."

"That's just it. The papers are full of bandits."

Joan laughed. "Good place for 'em. But I'm hoping I'll meet one sometime. I'm all ready for him. Look!"

Something small but formidable flashed in the candlelight, then was slipped back into an inner coat pocket.

Now Mrs. Hopper looked genuinely alarmed. She got up (she always was Joan's companion at dinner), and came around the table, her pleasant ruddy face under her white hair perturbed.

"Miss Joan——"

"Now, see here, Hoppy. I ought to have been born a boy. I wasn't one, but I've made up for it as nearly as a girl can. I'm strong as a boy of sixteen—and that's pretty strong. I'm awfully quick on the trigger. And besides, all this about bandits is mostly bunk. They don't stop cars that go by them at the clip mine does. But to please you, I'll take Blimp. He's a better guardian than any man."

"I'd rather you had a man, though, Miss Joan."

"Good-night, Dragon. You've done your duty. It might be worse—I might be going to ride Patsy in, you know."

She was off, with a pat on the plump shoulder under the black silk. Out into the soft darkness of the night, where the lamps in the parlour made a faint glow on the gravel path to the barn. Whistling softly, Joan slid back the door. An excited barking beyond the partition made her laugh. She opened the narrow door between. She was rushed upon by the three dogs.

"Down, Mike! Down, Lad! All right, Blimp—in you go. It's a male escort you are to-night, old man." She shut the other dogs back into their quarters, jumped into the roadster, and backed out, Blimp sitting beside her, very straight and important, his eyes shining. The duty of male escort suited him perfectly.

Nearly two hours later—it's a slow business getting into New York from the country, no matter how daring the motorist—Joan parked the car by the Plaza with Blimp mounting guard, hurried southward in a taxi to Forty-fifth Street, and followed an usher's flash-light down the aisle to her seat. The house was dark, but the lights were up on the stage and illumined her face as she took her place and pulled off her hat.

From a seat across the aisle and in a row behind, one not too absorbed in the play—nor in much of anything else at the moment—experienced a stirring of interest as her languid glance fell upon that vivid face with its attractive profile.

"Why, it's Joan Dare!" said a very lovely young woman to herself. "And all alone. I must—must see her. It might help—to see her. Oh, to look as keen as that—for anything!"

II

IT WASN'T till the middle of the first intermission that Joan noticed Margaret Faulkner. She had been much taken up with the play, which had turned out to be one of the most deservedly successful offerings of a season that hadn't presented too much of either brilliancy or meaning. The end of the first act left her stirred and sober, and she had sat thinking it over, her head bent. Then she had looked about her a little, idly, glancing across the aisle near which she sat, and being drawn by some movement to turn her head toward the row of seats in which was the young woman who had been looking at her. At the moment, Margaret Faulkner was speaking with the middle-aged man who was with her, but the languid expression hadn't much changed. If she was lovely, she was also weary—of something.

"Why, there's Peggy Faulkner! How beautiful—and how bored! Why shouldn't she be bored—that old bore beside her! And not another man she'd be interested in in sight. They always used to be flocking. What's the matter?"

Then she laughed at herself. "Of course, I haven't got a man myself. But I don't look like that."

Presently, the two pairs of eyes met. Joan smiled and waved. The smile that answered hers was suddenly warm and interested. Miss Faulkner's hand made a slight gesture of invitation. Joan nodded.

"Something's gone wrong with that girl," she reflected. "Of course, she isn't a girl, any more than I am. She wants something she hasn't got. I don't—not a thing—not really. I wonder if it makes all that difference in the look one gets. She's just as exquisite as ever, but unhappy. Well, we must see what we can do about it."

At the end of the second act, when, as Joan had foreseen, the middle-aged man, thirst in his eye, had excused himself and departed, she slipped across into the vacant seat.

"Well, *Peggy!*"

"Oh, Joan dear—I'm *so* glad to see you!"

Thus began the brief dialogue which was the beginning of so much history for them both. After an interchange of questions as to each other's enjoyment of the play, and other unimportant preliminaries to the renewal of a long-interrupted acquaintance, Joan decided to lose no more time in getting at what she wanted to know.

"Peggy! You're not as happy as you should be. I don't like the looks of you—though you're the most enchanting thing in this theatre to-night. Come along home with me—it's ages since I've seen you."

"I know. And I do want to see you, Joan. I knew it the minute I caught sight of you. Have you an apartment in town this winter?"

"I'm staying at Crossways—our country home. I drove in in the roadster. It's not a bad night, half, and I've rugs that will keep you warm—with a fur coat. I'll come around for you. I'm parked at the Plaza, close by you."

"Joan! You don't mean to-night! Drive 'way out there?"

"Why not? I'm doing it. Blimp's with me—warranted to eat up anybody who comes within a mile of me. Police dog of parts, and some company for a lone spinster taking a daredevil drive of thirty miles out into the wilds of Westchester County at midnight. Come along. I'd say, by one look at you, that you need to do something perfectly awful—like that!"

Joan's gay mockery had its effect, accompanied as it was by a sudden quick touch of the other's hand that spoke of an old and tried affection between the two. Margaret drew a long breath, as of relief.

"I'll go. I'll have to pack a bag for the night, and—may I stay a day or two?"

"As long as you like. You'll not find it as dull as you think. Can you say good-night to the elderly guy at your door?"

"Joan!" In spite of herself, Margaret Faulkner was moved to laughter. "He's really very nice."

"I can see he's nice—much too nice for you. You need somebody very jolly, your own age—not a grandfather. All right, I'll go back now—my coat's in my seat. Be at the drawbridge one half hour after the lights go out here."

"The——"

"Drawbridge, darling. Meaning you're eloping from the castle with me—young Lochinvar stuff, you know. 'Bye."

The lights were lowering, absentees were hurrying back down the aisles, and Joan slipped across to her own seat.

At a quarter to twelve, waiting impatiently before an apartment house in the East Sixties, Joan observed to Blimp, who sat beside her:

"You'll have to be very polite to her, Beautiful. She's not like me—she's china to my clay. Don't nose her, and don't be offish, either. Just sit like a gentleman between us, with your nice ears pointed right up looking for trouble. And don't listen to anything she says—it's not nice to listen. She has her troubles, as we shall see. And we're going to do something about 'em, if we can."

A slender figure, all gray fur, came out of a stone portal built to outrival all other and earlier built portals. A house boy carrying a small bag came along. Margaret Faulkner got into the roadster, and Blimp moved along to give her room, his pointed nose

touching the steering wheel, his shoulder firmly braced against Joan's. His eyes had glinted as he gave his mistress's guest one brief look. He knew he must accept her, but he had no idea of making friends with a perfect stranger.

"I'm absurdly afraid of police dogs, but I suppose he won't do a thing he shouldn't."

"Not a thing. What kind of dog do you harbour, up among the couch cushions?"

"A Pekinese."

"You *would*."

"Why would I?"

"A Pekinese wears a blanket when he goes out," explained Joan, as the car moved smoothly away. "You always did love blankets."

"Well—he needs it."

Joan laughed and spoke in Blimp's cocked ear. "You don't wear a blanket, do you, Beautiful? Let them as needs 'em wear blankets."

"You're the same Joan," murmured Margaret Faulkner, contentedly settling back among her furs and rugs. "That's why I'm going home with you to-night."

"Meaning I'm impudent. And you've been among the carefully polite so long you need a dash of pepper sauce after so much oil dressing."

But the two didn't talk much on the way out. Joan's driving was too swift for that. The night was

cold, the roads fairly clear, and it took much less time to go out than it had to come in. Neither bandits nor traffic cops interfered, somewhat to Joan's disappointment, because she felt that a touch of excitement would be good for her passenger.

"Here we are, almost at Crossways. Have you been out since the old house had so many things done to it?"

"It's a long time since I was here. I don't remember much about it, except that it was a delightful place to be in."

"Every time my family come home they think of new things to do to it, all of which make it look older than ever—which is what they want. The place has gone back at least a century in the last six years —and it was pretty ancient to begin with."

Margaret sat up to look, as the car swung into the driveway behind the brown house. Not much could be seen except a huddle of low walls, big chimneys, and a gleam of amber light from two lower windows. But it looked as though comfort and hospitality could be found within, and that was what she wanted.

III

"HOW quiet it is out here," Margaret said, as Joan closed the barn door upon the car and Blimp and the two walked toward the house.

"So quiet it will keep you awake, probably. Plenty of motors go by in summer, but not many at this time of night, in March."

The brown door opened to Joan's key, and the two came into the house. Several lights were still on, and Margaret looked about her in amazement.

"Oh, Joan, what an atmosphere!" she sighed.

"Meaning the rustic oil lights are smelly?" smiled Joan.

"You know what I mean. How adorable—how distinctive! Why, I didn't know even your artist father and mother could make a home quite like this. It's—I can't express it."

She moved about, gazing eagerly, while Joan ran out and down two steps to the dining room, returning immediately with a small tray holding a silver pitcher of milk and a plate of sandwiches which had been kept fresh under a moist napkin.

"Hoppy knows I'm always hungry when I come in. Here, have a glass of milk and a bite of grub. They'll be better for you than a cocktail."

"I can't eat for looking. Why, this house is a jewel —or rather, it's a jewel box, full of treasures."

"Maybe. Morton and Madelaine Dare always come home with tons of loot. The loft over the barn holds what they discard for the latest treasures. Mums calls the house a jumble, but Dad swears everything has an affinity for everything else, so it's all right. Anyhow, I like it, and I'm glad you do."

"I love it. It makes my apartment seem to me formal and cold. This is warm."

"It ought to be. You need a touch of warmth, Peggy."

But she didn't pursue that topic. She took her friend upstairs, along a winding hallway, down four steps, and into a low-ceiled room under the gables. She switched on a pair of rosy candlelights on a green-silk-ruffled dressing table. Margaret again looked about her with pleasure.

"What a darling room! Do you keep it warmed and ready for guests, or did you telephone out?"

"Both. It's always ready and often occupied. But I told Hoppy to put on an extra touch or two for you. Here's the tiniest bath you ever saw, under a roof so low—well, you won't bump your head, but tall men do. I never put a man here when our bachelor

room is empty. I've threatened to cushion the ceiling just over the tub."

The guest looked into the miniature bathroom. She admitted to herself that half a dozen like it could be placed in her own marble-tiled bathroom back in New York. But it was exquisitely inviting, fragrant with soaps and salts, and its linen rivalled anything she herself could produce. She reflected that there must be considerably more wealth in Joan's family than she had supposed. Not that it mattered. She loved Joan, always had since school days, for herself. One couldn't help doing that, even when one was quarrelling with her. For Joan distinctly could be quarrelled with. She wasn't all sweetness and light. But she seldom failed to be companionable—with a sparkle—and that, to Margaret's mind, was where so many people in her own world did fail. At the present hour she couldn't think of more than one or two who didn't. Which showed how much she really did need to come to Crossways, a place which itself seemed companionable from the moment one crossed the threshold.

"You never put a man here when your bachelor room is empty. Do you have many men?"

The question was asked casually, but Joan understood. Margaret's life, like the bachelor guest room, was empty. She knew plenty of men, Joan was sure, but they didn't interest her. Undoubtedly, she didn't

interest them. But why? She was supremely attractive to look at; at least moderately so to know.

"Every so often people drop in. The males are mostly relatives. They have the habit. Sometimes they bring a friend. You know my brother Sherman, don't you? We never know when he'll turn up with his partner or a pal. So you see I dress Hoppy prettily —she's my housekeeper—so that she and her snowy white hair can impress them and make things absolutely proper. We live near a small village, you know. The villagers rather keep tab on us.—Well, my dear, have you everything you want? May I unpack your case for you?—Now hear that!"

It was the sound of the front-door knocker. Margaret stared at her hostess with a sudden uneasy sensation. In a New York apartment house people came and went at all hours without exciting comment. But at a country crossroads, did people ordinarily knock one up at—yes, it was after one o'clock? But Joan was starting downstairs to answer, apparently without a thought of danger.

"Joan—had you better?"

"Mercy, it's nobody to murder us! Put yourself to bed, Peggy, and lock yourself in. It's Sher and his partner Hugh McNair, more than likely. They come at unearthly hours, passing by."

Margaret stood at her door listening, however, till she was assured that the arrival was a friendly one.

She heard unmistakable sounds of jovial male greeting, the voices becoming immediately subdued. By the time she was ready for bed, she heard footsteps and voices approaching. The footsteps paused outside her door, and another door, across the narrow hall, was thrown open. She caught bits of the dialogue, straining her ears, quite humanly, to do it. How could a guest but be interested in other guests, especially unexpected ones?

"This jolly room!"

"Isn't it? Wonder we go by the inn at the village to put up here, Sis?"

"Of course I don't wonder. Sorry the other guest rooms are torn up. Hoppy's house-cleaning by instalments. Be sure to take the bed, Hugh, and make Sher take the couch. It's exactly as comfortable." This was Joan.

"If it's exactly as comfortable—and I don't know but it's a little more so—why not be unselfish and give it to the guest?"

"I'd like it, Joan, really. Let Sher have his own bed."

"It isn't his own, and the couch isn't long enough for you. Do as I say, or I'll give you no breakfast."

"What time is breakfast?"

"I have mine at half-past seven."

"Good-*night!* Hugh and I've had a hard week. We'll be down at nine or ten."

"I don't mind when you come down. But to have breakfast when you get down, you'll have to make it by half-past eight."

"Don't mind her. She doesn't mean it. I say, tell Hoppy to order some of those puffy griddle cakes for us, will you? With a rasher of bacon—or better yet, those little sausages. Um-m-m!"

"If you like them as much as that, won't you have them right now?"

The door closed. A light knock on Margaret's door admitted her hostess.

"You adorable thing! Those blues and lavenders—you're a picture. You may know the house is now full of Sher and his friend and partner, Hugh McNair. Don't let 'em bother you. Sher never can keep still. He bluffs about sleeping late, because Hugh likes to. But Sher 'll be up at dawn, knocking things around. He loves the place so, he'll be all over it as long as he stays. Too bad. I thought we'd have a nice quiet time, you and I."

Her eyes were sparkling, and Margaret took this statement with a grain of salt. "I'm glad they're here," she said quickly. "I used to like your brother, and I haven't seen him for years."

"I didn't tell them you were here. Give them a joyous surprise in the morning. S' er always said you were the most beautiful creature he ever saw, and he hoped you had a heart though he knew it wasn't for

him. . . . Now I'm going. Sleep like a top, Peggy. You're going to get happier out here. People always do."

She was gone before Margaret could answer. In her own room, however, opening her windows to the crisp air just before she slipped into bed, Joan was thinking, as she had thought at the theatre, that making Peggy happier would be a task for the gods. She thought she had never seen more utter wretchedness behind a smiling mask.

IV

SIT up, Blimp! *Sit up!* You know me well enough to act like a gentleman when I say the word. You're not on guard duty now, we're all old friends here. Sit up, I say! Doggone the beggar—do you call that dog trained?"

"Sit up, Blimp," said a very casual low voice, with no note of command in it.

Blimp sat up, looking crestfallen. He had been walking off in a state of disgust, when Joan's voice recalled him. He sat looking reproachfully at her with his forepaws hanging limply and his pride in the dust until she said, quite as casually as before, "All right, old man," when he lowered himself to his natural all fours and begged to be excused. Being detained by no further word of his mistress, he departed without delay from the scene.

"Petticoat government," pronounced Sherman Dare. "That's the trouble with Dobermann Pinschers. They may have that human brain they're credited with, but they're too exclusive for me."

Sherman leaned against a young elm tree beside the gravel drive, whittling, in the March sunshine. The

morning had turned out unexpectedly mild and springlike. Opposite him stood his sister Joan, her hands in the pockets of a brown tweed coat, the orange tie which held the collar of her silk shirt fluttering in the breeze. Both young people were hatless, and both heads wore wavy, shining chestnut hair, the only difference being that one was cropped somewhat shorter than the other.

"Blimp naturally resents being called upon to do small-dog tricks," explained Joan. "Who wouldn't? Suppose someone you didn't especially care for came round and ordered you to stand on your head."

"I'd do pretty nearly anything for anybody this gorgeous morning. I say, when do our somnolent guests come down? I've been on deck two good hours now, and it feels to me like lunch time."

Joan glanced up at a window above them. "Hush!" she signalled.

Margaret Faulkner had been looking down, between her curtains, and as Joan spoke she softly closed the window. After a night of more or less restless and fitful sleep, she had been roused by Sherman's shout at Blimp. The sight of the brother and sister, both looking the picture of gay ambition to be up and doing, stirred her envy. She dressed, wishing she had brought real country clothes, like Joan's, instead of the sort which looked more like Park Avenue than Crossways. Joan certainly knew her own colouring;

the dash of orange silk beneath her tanned chin lighted her up and made a picture of her.

Margaret felt very colourless and neutral as she went down the stairs. She hadn't expected to spend a March week-end out of doors, but after seeing the Dares she had no doubt that it would be asked of her. Well, it didn't much matter where or how she spent it, except that, with these men present, more vivacity would be expected of her than she felt like producing. . . . And here was the other man, down just before her, and also looking as if he meant to spend the day in the open. What very bad luck! A couch by the fire and Joan's understanding talk was what she had come for.

"This is Hugh McNair, Margaret—Sher's partner. Miss Faulkner, of New York, Mr. McNair of all over the country and occasionally New York. Sher, you don't need presenting. . . . Come and have breakfast. . . . Sher and I've had a bite, because we happened to be up rather early, but we'll have some more coffee with you."

"Poor Peggy," she said to herself as she poured the coffee and made sure the sausages and griddle cakes of her brother's ordering were served at their smoking hottest, "she just doesn't feel up to it. It's a shame it happened this way, yet perhaps it'll turn out good for her, if she can just get going and play up. I expect she's so tired of playing up, she merely wanted to rest

out here. Well, I'll soon know whether to call off the men or let them stay around."

But the men, immediately after breakfast, called themselves off. They had both been extremely polite and friendly to Margaret, who had looked attractive, as she couldn't help doing in any circumstances, and had responded as cordially and charmingly as it was in her social code to do, no matter how little she felt like it. But, somehow, the truth that it cost her an effort made itself known to them all, and an indefinable constraint was the result. Not even Joan's audacious speeches nor Sherman's impudent replies could quite bring the four into a real approach.

"What do you say to a tramp over to Bramley, Mac?"

"Real tramp? 'Cross country?"

"Exactly that. The old car's due for a rest—she told me she wouldn't be taken out to-day. I said: 'Right you are, old girl. . . .' If you haven't got shoes that'll see you through the spring mud, Hugh, I'll lend you some."

"There isn't much mud," Joan promised them. "The frost isn't all out of the ground yet. You can take the old trail through the woods—if you're game."

"Hugh's game for anything. He's been crying for a day in the real country. Now he's got it he's going to take it, up to the hilt, even though a nine-thirty

breakfast's a most unsportsmanlike beginning. Gosh! —wish it happened to be open season for anything on the wing!"

"Might do a bit of rifle practice," McNair suggested.

"Pretty tame, after you've ramped through the woods. Still, we'll try it, if you say so, when we get back."

They were off up the stairs for the footwear that could stand the March conditions. They came down in attire somewhat nondescript, though comfortable and suitable enough.

"We wouldn't do as examples of 'What the Well-Dressed Man Should Wear in the Country,' exactly," grinned Sherman, getting into an old brown shooting jacket, and noting the combination he had effected with gray golf knickers. "And you're a bird in those gaudy stockings of mine, with your conservative tastes. Nemmine. Come on. So long, ladies!"

Joan watched them from the window as they tramped away waving back at her; and Margaret knew instinctively that she was longing to be with them.

"Why don't you go, too? I know you must want to, Joan dear. Do run after them. I'll be perfectly happy, here by this lovely fire, among all these books."

"Not much. And they don't want any women along when they go off like that. I've had my run—

covered a couple of miles before breakfast. That's why I could tuck away two additional flapjacks with my second cup of coffee, as you noted. Wish you'd been as hungry."

"I don't seem to have much appetite, for some reason. Spring, perhaps."

"You'll get one, here, if you'll stay long enough. Why not send in for some things and make me a real visit?"

Margaret had dropped into a corner of a great downy couch which faced the fireplace. Joan, perching on the edge of the table which backed the couch, scanned the profile her friend presented to her as she looked into the fire.

"That's wonderful of you, my dear. Of course, I'd love it, but I'm booked to sail the first of April for Paris."

"What for?—if you don't mind the impudence you told me you were coming out here to get from me. What for are you sailing for Paris? Just to get clothes? Oh, I didn't mean that," as Margaret looked up quickly with a sober shake of the head. "If I looked like you I'd go clothe myself in the fashion marts of the world. What I do mean is, do you awfully want to go?"

Another gesture of denial answered her. Then Margaret said slowly: "I suppose it's habit. Aunt Cecilia and I always do go over in the spring. She

thinks she has to, and she wants me with her. We do get clothes—who wouldn't, in Paris? As a matter of fact, she isn't going this year, because she's booked for a trip to China, with special friends. But she took it for granted I'd go, as usual, and so did I, quite without thinking much about it. I've plenty of friends there, and invitations. She looked up somebody she knows for me to cross with, and so I'm going with Mrs. Tarleton."

"I see. But why do it, if you don't really want to? Mrs. Tarleton can go by herself, I suppose. She looks as if she could go to the North Pole, with that grim visage of hers. I'd never pick her out as a travelling companion."

"I didn't, as I told you. Aunt Cecilia is so used to arranging things, she had the reservations practically made with Mrs. Tarleton's before she even mentioned it to me. They happened to meet at a tea, and Aunt Cecilia telephoned from there to make sure of getting quarters next hers." Margaret smiled, rather oddly. "So you see——"

"No, I don't see. Why do the thing you've always done, if you're not keen to?—and I don't think you are. Maybe you've—— May I say what I really think about you?"

"I wish you would. I came out here with you because I hoped you'd give me a new idea. I don't seem to have any, myself."

"And you're tired of the old ones—I can read that in your face. The thing I thought about you, when I saw you in the theatre last night, was that—now, don't take it differently from the way I mean you to, for you were never more lovely to look at—the thing I thought about you was that you'd gone slightly stale on living. Over-lived, maybe? One can do that, you know."

"No—if anything, I've under-lived."

"Over-living means under-living, sometimes," observed Joan sagely. "Of course, we're talking around the point—trying to get at it without saying anything definite. I don't want to try to force any confidences, Peggy. We used to be pretty good friends, but we haven't seen much of each other for a long time. You may not care to tell me why you're so unhappy. But I have a notion that if you'd come and stay out here with me for a while, whatever your problems are they'd begin to clear up."

Margaret turned and stared up at Joan. Unshed tears seemed to be lurking in her eyes. Joan gave her look back—a steady, clear look, like a man's for promise of comprehending help.

"That's twice," Margaret said, "you've said you thought me unhappy. Will you tell me why you think that?"

"Why? Don't you think you'd know if I were unhappy? It's a thing nobody can successfully dis-

guise. One can be game, a good sport, keep smiling, and all that. But real unhappiness always shows. It takes the—well—the *glow* out of people's faces. Yours used to glow. Now—it doesn't. Never mind, it can do it again. I'd like to help make it, that's all. And I think staying out here and stirring up your circulation with horseback rides and tramps would be most awfully good for you. Much better than beauty treatments and stimulants."

"I shouldn't think you'd want me around if I'm really as depressed as you imagine."

"I shouldn't have you around all the time," promised Joan, with her sudden flashing smile. She slid off the table. "I'm a terribly busy person, and I shouldn't give you all my time. I've one permanent job and half a dozen side lines. They fill my days." She walked over to a large desk bookcase and opened a drawer. She took out a big leather holder filled with loose leaves. One of these she laid in Margaret's lap.

"Joan! Did you do this?"

"And this. And this. Sketches for a series of city-and-country life articles a friend of mine is doing. It's great fun."

"But these are wonderful."

"Not wonderful. Just nippy, I hope. He thinks they go with his stuff, and, to be honest, I think so, too. Blimp's the model for one of the dogs, as you see."

"I remember the funny things you used to do at

school. But those were cartoons and caricatures—we all thought them clever."

"They were insulting. I still do 'em, but I like these better. Perhaps that's because I'm so crazy over Bob Ramsey's articles. Vignettes, his things are, really—short, amusing, sometimes a trifle scathing, but mostly good-natured. So I have to do mostly good-natured sketches to go with them. By the way, here's a quick study of Bob's head—pretty good of him, by a lucky chance. I'm not so good at actual portraits, because my tendency always is toward over-emphasis of the outstanding points, which makes the caricature. But I did this in sober earnest, because Bob's face interests me. He's alive, isn't he? Intensely alive. Sometime he's going to go right up in smoke—nothing left."

Margaret took up the sheet, studying closely the eager-eyed gaze which met her from the good-looking though rather worn young face which Joan had evidently drawn with much care, in spite of the rapidity of the work.

"It is an interesting face," Margaret commented.

"Bob himself is interesting. Just a boy, really; yet remarkably mature in his observation of life. He works too hard, plays too hard. I don't know which does him in fastest. He burns himself up both ways."

"Does he live here, in the village?"

"He lives in New York, mostly, in what he calls a hole-in-corner. Comes out here now and then and spends a night with his father, who's a market gardener, and a good one. Nice old chap—sterling—sensible—pretty puzzled over his son Bob. No wonder. Bob runs round his father in circles and gets him dizzy with watching. Proud of his boy, though, like a staid old dog trying to understand the antics of his puppy son. Puppy's the word for Bob. He's like one with a bone when he gets a brand-new idea. Rushes to me to bury it in my mind, and then stays to play with it instead. We worry it together and get a lot of fun out of it."

"You look," observed Margaret, studying her friend with eyes which grew more amazed and skeptical all the time, "as if you got a lot of fun out of everything."

"I do. Like Blimp, I'm always looking for trouble—and usually find it. I get into all sorts of jams, and get out of 'em again." Joan laughed reminiscently. "Tell you about some of 'em, sometime."

"Tell me now. I'd much rather talk about you than me, just now. Sometime—I want to talk about me."

"Can't talk about either of us." Joan's glance was following somebody outside the window. "Here comes my carpenter to discuss a job he's going to do for me, beginning to-morow. He's all dressed up in

his Sunday clothes. Look—isn't he a peach of a carpenter?"

Joan's tone was so eager, Margaret rose and peeped from the window. She saw a tall, lean young man with a warmly tanned face and a deep-set eye, approaching at a brisk pace.

"He doesn't look to me like a peach of anything," she observed. "I never saw a plainer man."

"I never," said Joan emphatically, "miss a moment of time that I can spend with him, when he's doing a job for me. Bob got two of his thundering best sketches out of Chris Rand. I illustrated them, up to the hilt—my hilt. I'm prouder of them than of anything I've done in a long time. Come to think of it, Peggy, you couldn't do better than stay on with me, just to get to know Chris Rand. He's somehow—energizing."

She ran out of the room. Continuing to stand by the window, Margaret watched the meeting between the two, who took up their station ten feet away on the gravel path. Blimp joined the party, and the carpenter stooped to pat him, evidently accepted as a valued acquaintance by the aristocratic dog who had refused to "sit up" for Joan's brother.

It really was interesting to watch Joan Dare during the talk which followed. Strange to say, Margaret had hardly realized into what individuality of charm her one-time school friend had grown, until she saw

her talking with the man Rand. If he had been a blood brother of her spirit, she could hardly have lavished more of that singularly arresting personality of hers upon him. This was outwardly shown by the way she looked at him, laughed with him, made sketches and plans for him, in a notebook pulled from her tweed coat pocket and poised on her knee, while she perched upon the arm of a rustic seat beside the path. The carpenter, looking on, presented to Margaret's gaze a profile like that of a bronze statue, nose and chin prominent, deep-set eye full of both interest and keen criticism. It was to be perceived, at this close range, that his face, though undeniably plain, had its points; and that though his clothes—of blue serge—did not look quite as though an expensive tailor had made them, they were not unbecoming to him. Altogether, though why Joan should bother to be charming to a workman was beyond Margaret, the fact was established in Margaret's mind that her friend did care to bother, or she wouldn't do it. And when both of them outside burst into a fit of extremely hearty laughter, Margaret saw that Joan was most certainly enjoying the man. The onlooker suddenly, and strangely, envied her. If to have a "glow" in one's face, as Joan had said, was a sure symptom of happiness, then she must be supremely happy at that moment. For her face was amazingly alive—no other word could express it. But *why?* It was hard to guess.

Presently Joan ran in, seized a book from the table and ran out again, without appearing to notice her friend in the window. She bestowed the book upon the carpenter, who received it with a nod and slipped it into his pocket. Then he went away, first shaking hands with his employer. The grip seemed to be a hearty one, and lasted for the fraction of a second longer than Margaret would have supposed hand grips with one's carpenter, supposing that in the country one did eccentrically shake hands with one's carpenter on parting from him, might have been expected to last.

Blimp accompanied him to the gate, where man and dog parted with every evidence of cordial regret.

Joan came in again, lights still up in her face.

"Hi, Peg," she said informally, "don't you want to come out for a walk instead of mulling by the fire? Inside always seems hot and cramped after one's been out."

The time for confidences appeared to Margaret to have passed. The interview with the carpenter had left Joan in no mood for introspection by the fire, that was easy to see. Rather must she be in some sort of action. With a suppressed sigh, Margaret rose.

"Yes, of course," she said. And wondered whether, after all, Joan's invitation to stay on for a visit had best be even considered. Paris—or carpenters? For the moment, Paris had it.

V

WELL, Peggy dear, I'm mighty sorry you won't stay longer. 'Fraid it's been stupid for you here. Sorry. I'll get you out again sometime, when something's really going on."

"It's been delightful, Joan, and I've enjoyed it much more than I can tell you. It's I who've been stupid. You're just scintillating with the joy of living. I'm—envious. Perhaps that's why I'm going."

Margaret bent over the bag that she was packing. Joan had caught the sound of tears in her voice. Suddenly she came close.

"Peggy!" Her low voice was coaxing. "I thought you'd tell me. Can't you trust me?"

"I meant to. You've—been so busy—with everybody."

Joan considered. She had been busy. She had thought it best for Margaret to be let alone, since she hadn't chosen to reveal the cause of her low spirits, and had responded so perfunctorily to the various overtures made to her by Sherman and Hugh during their short stay. They had now gone.

"Beautiful but frigid," had been Joan's brother's

verdict. "Oh, well—if she doesn't like us, she doesn't. There doesn't seem to be anything one can do about it."

Hugh McNair had been not less outspoken. "The right man could find something to do about it. She's wonderful to look at, but I don't get on with her. I'm not the sort to interest her, of course."

"Peggy," urged Joan, "tell me now, before you go back. And then—don't go back, if you'd care at all to stay. I don't want you to be envious of anybody—you don't need to be."

Suddenly Margaret dropped everything and flung herself down on the floor at Joan's feet, burying her face in her lap. Joan's tanned hand came softly upon the fair waves of her friend's hair, stroking it. After a minute or two Margaret began, in a smothered voice:

"Oh, you were right—I'm unhappy. Desperately unhappy. I just don't know how to face going on with a life that's spoiled already."

"Spoiled?"

"I mean—I've had a blow I can't get over. I ought to get over it. I'm so weak I can't. You would, if a thing like it had happened to you. You'd put on your riding clothes and jump into the saddle and go galloping off over your hills. And when you came back, you'd be—whistling!"

"As light o' love as that? Maybe I wouldn't be

whistling, either. I'm not always whistling. Sometimes I'm—howling. It's easy to wave one's arms about and pretend great gusto, but quite often one does have to do a lot of pretending. So—I think I can understand, Peggy, if you find it hard to get over something. It's—a man?"

"How did you know?" The voice was smothered.

"My dear"—Joan's mind was smiling, if her lips were grave—"it seems mostly to be a man with us—Heaven knows why. We ought to be independent of them—we try to be—we wave the flag. And then, suddenly, it trails in the dust. The very most flag-waving woman I ever knew, one with the most satiric tongue and pen for the whole damnable subject, which was what she called it, had a nervous breakdown right in the middle of an article she was writing to assert that the woman who lets a man disturb her life is an utter idiot. And the breakdown was caused by the undeniable fact that a man *had* disturbed her life—disturbed it into chaos. When she got well she married him, but it took his immediate presence at the crisis to pull her out of it. I always knew she was a liar when I read those things of hers, and that proved it. We can't get along without the miserable sinners, and what's the use of trying? The good Lord knew we couldn't when He worked out the plan of us."

"Oh, why—*why*, did He do it?—if He did."

"Don't know. Have to take it for granted He knew.

And though it took centuries to produce us, the machinery never got out of gear in its task of turning out two sexes who can't get on without each other. When the job was done, it was irretrievably done. So—that's how I know that it's some man who's got himself tangled up in your affairs. All right, with this premise we'll proceed."

It was easier after that for Margaret to tell the tale. Something about Joan's lightly matter-of-fact yet comprehending way of putting things did help those who confided in her—and they were many—to get started. It was all quite what Joan had expected to hear.

"He seemed to care—I really didn't let myself go until he had given—oh, what seemed positive evidence that he did. In the beginning I hadn't believed he could be in earnest. He's at least ten years older than I am, and he's so brilliant, so much beyond me in education, and intelligence, and experience."

"You've all those to a certain degree." Joan added the qualification because her honesty made her.

"Not as he has. What's school life for education? And what's a life filled with dinners and dances and trips to Paris for clothes, compared with the sort of thing he's made of? He came to see me a great many times—and sometimes—he—almost made love to me. It was somehow more fascinating than if—if he really had. Oh, there's nothing I can accuse him of.

He never did quite make love to me. And then—he began not to come. I never knew why. I tried to seem to be the one to break off the friendship, but of course I wasn't. Now—I haven't seen him for months. I've tried to forget him, put him out of my life. But—oh, Joan—I can't. . . . I simply *see* him, all the time."

"Of course," Joan said, after a brief silence, "it's easier to get over a thing of that kind if you're busy, desperately busy, so busy you haven't time to think. I don't know just what would keep you busy like that. Have you—you haven't any idea what made him change?"

"I think—I suppose—I didn't interest him enough. Not as much as he thought I was going to when he first knew me."

"I know—that's the simple diagnosis in most such cases. Well, aren't you likely to see him again, sometime, somewhere?"

"Oh, yes. When he's in this country—he's away a great deal—I'm likely to meet him, if I don't avoid him. But I'm afraid to meet him. I'm afraid I show what's happened to me. I wouldn't have him guess it for worlds."

The tone was very wretched. And the fact was undeniably true that Margaret did show that something had "happened to her," as Joan had noted the moment she had seen her in the theatre. The light had

gone out of her face—that continued to be the way Joan thought of the change.

"I wish," said Joan thoughtfully, "you could just get hold of yourself and make yourself into something quite new to him, so that, when you do see him, you could take him off his feet—if, that is, he's really worth taking off them. Are you quite sure of that? He easily might not be, you know."

"Oh, he is." Margaret sat up, her face flushing a little. "If I should tell you who he is, you'd know, beyond a doubt. I—can't tell you, somehow."

"No, don't. You'd be sorry—it would make you self-conscious. And I'm not going to tell you to try to forget him, if you care so much. So long as he isn't married to anybody else, I'd say the thing to do, since you're so sure he's worth the trouble, is to become what will interest him. Which doesn't mean I'd advise a correspondence course in how to fascinate and hold—what drivel those things must be, by the way! It simply means that I think a woman has just as much right as a man to pursue and win, if she can, so long as she's subtle about it. Why not? If the truth were known, of course, half the marriages are made that way, even though women pretend they were the pursued. But in special cases, it undoubtedly takes more art than meets the eye. . . . Go along to Paris, Peggy, and get yourself a particularly effective lot of clothes,

especially the sort of thing you'd use out here, if you were staying with me. We have outdoor parties—we have all sorts of good times, especially in the summer. And here's my advice—come back here and spend the summer with me. You've no idea how nice this old place is in June. Let me take you in hand, teach you to ride—you don't ride?—And swim—you don't swim?—And shoot—you don't shoot?"

Somehow the two broke down into laughter over the pictures these negative phrases drew.

"Oh, Joan, I *am* colourless! That's what you're telling me. But why should you take all that trouble with me when your own life is so full?"

"Because I enjoy enforcing my own hobbies. I'll be a regular slave-driver with you. And when I get through with you, your blood will be running so red and fast you'll either not care a hang about His Royal Highness or be so full of spirit you'll draw him like a magnet."

"I can't tell you," Margaret said, as they parted, "how grateful I am to you for not telling me to 'brace up and forget.' That was what I was sure you'd say."

"The way to become an oracle," said Joan gravely, "is to note what advice is likely to be wanted and then give it. Besides, who wants to forget what has taken hold of one's life like a thing of that sort? Good-bye, Peggy! See you in June?"

"I think, perhaps. Anyhow, I'll write you from Paris. Meanwhile, good-bye, and I'll keep the invitation to warm myself by."

Two days later, Hugh McNair and Joan saw Margaret's ship sail. Joan had stopped at her brother's office to pick him up and draft him into going to the pier with her, but he had begged off and sent his partner. McNair had been willing enough to take Sherman's place. Returning, he and Joan recalled the scene to each other in short phrases, suited to conversation in heavy traffic which kept Joan taking note of signals and shifting gears.

"Didn't she look exquisite? No wonder she kept getting snapshotted."

"She's a beautiful-looking creature," McNair agreed. "Quite a contrast to that stony-faced Mrs. Tarleton. To my mind, that woman always looks like a gargoyle."

"Yes, doesn't she? She wears stone hats, too—I'm positive they're stone. Peggy wasn't keen on going with her, but her aunt arranged it, and Peg's so amiable she wouldn't change it."

"Miss Faulkner looks very amiable. But not very happy. I noticed that she gave exactly the same smile to each of the three men who were seeing her off that she gave to me; and she didn't owe me anything very friendly. That oldest one seemed to hang closest, but she showed him no special favour."

"No. I hope not. . . . Oh, I wish I could take that taxi-driver's wheel off! He tried to bump me, I know he did."

"If you hadn't been so quick on the trigger he'd have done it. You're the best woman driver I ever saw."

"Thanks, a lot. Look at the ruffian—he's trying to keep beside us. Maybe I short-tipped him sometime, and he's recognized me."

"You'd never short-tip anybody."

"You don't know me. When I've been shopping too extravagantly I'd steal the pencils from a blind beggar."

Hugh McNair laughed. "That's why you're urging Miss Faulkner to come back this summer, isn't it? To steal her pencils. You can't really want her."

"I can't? Why not?"

"She's not your sort, Joan. In that home of yours, she reminds me of an expensive but useless piece of furniture—in the way and no joy to anybody, except to look at."

"Well, if she's good to look at——"

"One doesn't buy furniture to look at."

"Some things one does, though. You don't do Peggy justice, and neither does Sher. All she needs is something to call out her reserves. And we'll just do that to her when she comes—if she comes. She wouldn't promise, but I'm betting she will."

"She will, if Crossways gets into her blood, as it does into everybody's who goes there. I wonder if you know what a place it is to think about when one's away from it."

"Don't I, just! When I get away from it, settled into a little New York apartment, or crossing on a liner, or staying at a hotel in London, it comes to me in my dreams. That's what I owe my clever father and mother for making it what it is. It's a sort of repository of all they've found in life and in the world. Just an old farmhouse, originally, you know."

"To which they've added a thousand touches of their genius. I don't know of any place like it."

Joan laughed. "Together now—you and I. *Team—team—team!*"

She turned a corner and brought her motor up snappily to the curb in front of the great building in which was the office of Dare & McNair, bondbrokers, only lately on their own, and working hard to make their own place amidst the tremendous competition of the business and financial world.

"Come out often, you and Sher."

"Thanks. No danger but we'll make it whenever our consciences'll let us."

Joan knew that. Knew it particularly of the junior member of the firm.

VI

OH—*Joan!*"

The call was shouted from the lower hall. Mrs. Hopper appeared.

"I'm not sure she's in, Mr. Ramsey. She mostly isn't in, these nice April days."

"She's got to be in, Mrs. Hopper. I wired her I'd be here at three."

"Here's the message now, coming up the walk." Mrs. Hopper was looking past the visitor's shoulder. Robert Ramsey turned, frowning, to see a uniformed boy on a bicycle.

"Nice service you have out here! See here, boy, I sent this wire three hours ago. Why didn't they 'phone it in? What the devil—— Here, I'll sign for it, and then you can ride back slowly—very slowly—I should advise a crawl—and present it to the office with my compliments. Tell 'em the only reason the gift isn't accompanied by flowers is because I haven't time to pick 'em, not because the message isn't dead enough to be interred."

The bicycle retreated, bearing the browbeaten uniform, turning over in his puzzled mind the ques-

tion of delivering the unopened yellow envelope back at the office or of tearing it up. Anyhow, the message was signed for—he should worry. He didn't worry, he whistled—when well out of sight. One didn't whistle, if one were wise, in the presence of a young man whose look was as black as that one's.

"Which way do you think she may have gone, Mrs. Hopper?"

"I really couldn't say, Mr. Ramsey. Maybe Jenkins out in the garden there would know, if she's riding—and she mostly is."

"Riding! Then she's liable not to be home till——"

"There she is, Mr. Ramsey!"

It was a relieved young man who raced down the path to meet the incoming Patsy, with Joan on his back.

"My lucky day, after all! I wired you, and the blamed message got here after I did."

"Bob! It is luck, at that. I started for Timperley and forgot my crop. Had to come back for it. Patsy still shies at perfectly innocent-looking rocks. Not all rocks, just those of certain shapes."

"Bless his shying, then. Here, come down, please. I've got the most gorgeous thing in my head to show you—it can't wait."

"Don't you want to ride Nick and come——"

"I don't. I won't have your attention divided between me and your nag's stones. I want you all

to myself, in the library, with the door shut and Mrs. Hop under orders to keep it so."

His sparkling eyes and autocratic manner were entirely familiar to Joan, his friend. She knew genius must be burning brightly, and she must help to pile on the fuel.

"Will you wait till I change my clothes?" she asked, as they came into the house. "Of course, I'm a bit horsey. Jenky was busy, and I saddled Pats myself."

"I don't care for that. And I don't smell it."

He put his nose down against her shoulder and sniffed. "Roses!" he declared.

"Nevertheless, you'll have to wait, Bobby. I won't be three minutes."

"Make it two!" he shouted after her. Then he went into the library and paced about, his leather brief case opened on the table and ready to disgorge its flaming contents. He couldn't sit down, he was too much excited.

She came back well within ten minutes, to find him fuming. But one look at her disarmed him.

"Golly, but you're a peach of a child!" he conceded. "All right, now sit down and listen. No, we won't light up—I can't have you looking round for ash trays."

"Idiot! You are a dictator as usual. Well, fire away."

"Sure you're comfortable?"

"Sure."

"Aren't going to think of an order for Hop or Jenk or any of 'em, just as I get going?"

"I gave them all before I came in here. Heavens, Bobby, don't you think I *know you* when you've just done something?"

"You ought to, but I always suspect you of having other fool things on your mind, till I get full possession of it. Then—I defy it to get away from me."

His dark brows were drawn together, but he was smiling. She had curled herself in a corner of the couch before the fireplace, in which a log smouldered, though the windows were open. She had put on a straight frock of scarlet silk. Scarlet was the colour for Bob to-day—she had known that at the first sight of him.

"It's yours now. Stop fussing. I'll think of nothing but you and your work."

"They're one and the same to-day, I'm telling you. This stuff is right out of *me*—myself. All set, then. Now, listen! Listen with all you've got, Joan. This is——"

He drew a breath which expanded his slightly narrow chest and brought a tinge of colour into a cheek which knew the shaded electric light oftener than the sunlight, and prepared to read. He stood on the hearth rug, plainly too nervous to sit down. Joan

understood that her verdict was at such moments a matter of deep concern to him. He seldom tried out any first drafts on anybody but herself; never, if he could possibly get to her.

He was "intensely alive"—the phrase with which Joan had described him to Margaret was a true one. Three years out of college, where he had been prominent in all literary ways and obscure in all ways scientific and athletic. He had been a star in dramatics, his slender figure and dark, good-looking face lighted by eyes which could glow lovingly or glare balefully, according to his rôle. He had written a prize play while in college, and had written everything on earth since; some things very good, some execrably bad, but all informed with his own personality, which was eccentric, egoistic, but always more or less magnetic.

"This is a one-act play. Don't scold me—I haven't dropped the sketches—I've one for you here. Good enough, too, if I'm any judge—which I ought to be. But this thing got me by the throat, and I had to throttle it to get rid of it. Ultimately I'm going to do a set of plays and make a book. This is *The Marriage of Minds*. Like it?"

"Can't say till I've heard it."

"Dolt—darling dolt, I mean, of course. Don't quibble when I'm in this state. Like the *title?*"

"Can't tell. Go ahead. I suppose it's ironic."

"In spots. Not so terribly, though. I believe there's such a thing, don't you?"

"Oh, Bobby, you sound awfully naïve! Go *ahead!*"

He began. He read rapidly, with emphasized inflections, to make his meaning sure. The sheets of his typescript shook slightly in his slender, long fingers. The thing was fiery from the start, burned flaringly in the middle, and died down to hot ashes at the end. By the time that end was reached Joan was staring at him, her own face taking fire from his. He stopped, looking at her, his lips pressed tight together to control their quivering. He dropped on his knees before her, burying his dark head in her lap. She felt his shoulders heave under her touch.

"Bob—dear! It's amazing—it really is. I don't agree with it all—not all—but it—shakes me. It sounds as if you did it in the middle of the night. Of course you did!"

Bob sat up, thrusting back his hair and shamedly dashing a tear from his eye.

"I did—last night, and haven't slept since. Tell me, on your honour"—he put both hands on her shoulders, as he knelt before her and gazed into her face at close range with eyes which were a little bloodshot—"*is* there something there—the thing I meant to get? The indescribable, inexpressible, transcendent, terrible thing? It *did* shake you?"

"Of course it did. Can't you see that?"

"Then I'm satisfied." Suddenly he pressed his lips to hers—a brief, hard kiss.

She drew back. "Oh, *Bob*——"

"Damn! . . . You know well enough what that means. Simply that I'm wrought up to the breaking point, and if I can't break a bit with you I'll go to pieces. You do understand me, Joan—don't let me think you don't. I couldn't bear it."

"Of course I do, old fellow." She was smiling, and she gently took his face between her firm hands. "Now, cool down, my dear. You've truly done a stirring thing, and done it superbly. Now you must rest."

"Not till we've read it through together." He scrambled to his feet and sat down beside her. "Put your feet down on the floor and give me room. All right. Can you make out my awful type hand? Come on. Now, put all you've got"—it was a favourite phrase of his—"into that part of *Arlenne*. You can do it."

She could, there was no question of that. It was in her blood, as it was in his, to enjoy a dramatic situation and to play up to it. Together they read the twenty typed pages, and more than once Bob paused to say under his breath, "Gosh! You've *got* her—to the life." When they finished, he lay back beside her, his head against the couch-back, his long figure stretched to its fullest length. He was almost panting.

"Lord! I know I've done it," he murmured exultingly. "But I'm all in. Mind if——"

He was pulling a small flask from his hip when Joan stopped him with her hand on his.

"Don't, Bob—please. I can't bear to see you take it when you're worn out like this. I'll have some tea or coffee for you in two minutes. And sandwiches. You need to be fed."

"What nonsense! I'll take the sandwiches, but I need the nip vitally. Don't be silly."

She was really stronger than he, morally as well as physically, for she took the silver flask from his shaky hand and, smiling at him, laid it upon the table. It was within his reach, but though he scowled at her he let the flask lie and didn't touch it, even after she had left the room. She returned presently, bearing a tray containing no afternoon tea blandishments, but sturdy sandwiches of cold rare beef and a slim silver pot of smoking coffee.

"Oh, well—I have to take you as I find you," he admitted, as he ate hungrily, drank thirstily, and wiped his lips, into which the colour had returned. They had been nearly white when he had finished reading. "And I have to find you the minute I've committed my soul to paper. I don't know what it is about you——"

"I do. I've been a mother to you too long now not to know."

"Mother! Well, I need a mother, and sometimes you're like that. I couldn't cry on your shoulder if you weren't, I suppose. But—you're a fearful lot more than that to me, Joan. Sometimes—you're just—my heart's blood."

Joan's gay yet not unkind laugh showed that she did know how to take him when he was overwrought. She patted his hand as he sat beside her.

"There, there! It's time you came down from the dramatic and began to get ready to sleep. For that's what you're going to do, for a good hour before you go back. If you don't relax now, you won't sleep again to-night."

"All right. Maybe I can, now I know you like my stuff. Don't you *love* it, Joan?"

As she got up to give him room, he rolled over on his back and lay looking up at her, the tense expression of his face beginning to let go, the weariness beneath coming uppermost.

"Of course I love it, Bob, you frightful egotist. Now I'll put this rug over you and leave you. And while you're sleeping I'll read the play through once more, by myself, outside."

He caught at her hand. "Will you really?" He pressed his lips to it. "Oh, you're the best pal in the world. All right, pull it away, I've left my mark on it. Glory, I *am* tired!"

She drew the curtains over the open windows,

leaving them swaying in the light spring breeze, and went out of the room. Suddenly, she was tired, too. She often was when she was through with a scene with Bob. But it was usually worth it. Somehow, although he demanded much of her, he strangely enriched her. He made emotion real. But emotion is wearing, and the air and sunshine in the awakening garden paths would refresh her, even though she read the play again, as she meant to. . . .

But outside she found Christopher Rand, come to show her the plans for the studio, which she had made and he had revised. And Rand stayed for half an hour, sitting on the bench beside the gravel path, with the sun pouring down on the sheets of drafting paper he had laid in Joan's lap. When the half hour was over, her emotion was gone, and her eager interest was absorbed in something more concrete, if less subtle, than the marriage of minds. Minds might or might not be capable of marriage, but studios upon the rocky hillside above the orchard could be built precisely as one had dreamed they could. It was Joan's strong charm and her sturdy salvation that she could thus plunge from sentiment to sense—and back again, if need be—with no loss to the zest of her life.

VII

IT WAS strange to Margaret Faulkner to recall, as she voyaged homeward early in June, how eager she had been to sail. Paris, as all its worshippers know, is at its most marvellous in June. And yet, after the inevitably trying interview with Mrs. Tarleton, in which Margaret had stated her intention of returning, and had had a decidedly gargoyle-like expression of face turned upon her, she had counted the days till her ship should sail.

"Oh, of course, if you prefer a summer in the back country at home to one over here," Mrs. Tarleton had said, shrugging her broad shoulders, "it is quite a matter for you to decide. The Dares themselves stay in Paris, I note—or in the Swiss Alps, in the summer—rather than in that ideal spot in Westchester County you describe. Madelaine Dare raves about—what is it they call it?—Crossroads, or some such name. I met her somewhere last week. But she and Morton spend about one month out of the year there. As for Joan, she's what my grandmother used to call a hoyden. A horsey, doggy, spraddling sort of girl, blunt and often rude. Not your type at all,

Margaret. To speak frankly, I wonder you can want to be with her. The type of men you're likely to meet out there aren't desirable, either. They're the struggling sort—none of them have arrived. And I'm sure absolutely none of them have either money or position. Take my advice, my dear, and stay on with me."

Margaret had been glad to get away from Mrs. Tarleton. Very different had been the attitude of Mrs. Dare, Joan's mother, upon whom she had gone to call.

"I don't blame you, Peggy dear," Madelaine had said, as they had tea together in the Dare studio. "You've done all this sort of thing so much. Staying in a place like Crossways is so different—so reviving. We wish with all our hearts we could spend more time there. It's such a little place, yet somehow so dear to us. I wake up from dreams of it, sometimes. And with Joan in it, it's so—lighted up. Doesn't Joan make whatever place she's in feel that way? Is it just because she's our daughter that she seems like that? Do look at this. It's just come, and I can't stop gazing at it."

She sprang up to bring a big mounted photograph, which she explained was an enlargement of a small snapshot, of Joan on horseback, against a background of Crossways itself, the low, vine-covered house with its big central chimney, its hedges and masses of

shrubbery. Joan was laughing, her attitude and that of her horse like that of two radiant young creatures who purposed to stay but a passing moment in the spot where they were poised for flight.

"Oh, that's a delightful picture," Margaret exclaimed, studying it. "That makes me want to go back more than ever. Joan *is* alive, from head to foot —that's what attracts me toward her so. And she makes other people feel alive, too, just to be with her."

"Doesn't she? I feel it myself, always, bless her! And she seems to be getting such a lot out of this year at home, after all her experiments in living here and there. Somehow, the restlessness seems to have left her—she says so herself. She's working hard and playing hard, she declares. What can be better than a combination like that? Nothing, as I well know."

"Joan's been so fortunate in having a father and mother who understand her so well, and let her do as she wishes, without advising her all the time," Margaret had said to Mrs. Dare, as she left her. And Madelaine Dare had smiled her charming smile, much like Joan's own, and had answered, "Oh, but we believe so in not advising. My husband and I have worked out our own salvation, and we want Joan to work out hers. She will—we've all kinds of faith in her. She has come a few croppers—so did we—but she's learned to ride now, and she'll stick in the saddle.

Give her our dearest love, Peggy, and kiss her three times running, for me!"

So now, on shipboard, Margaret was looking forward eagerly to getting back to Crossways. It was odd how her thoughts ran upon details of the place. The big, low-ceiled brown-wainscotted room with the three steps up into the library; the long rows of books; the odd, rare lamps; the treasures everywhere, yet none crowding. Upstairs, the exquisitely appointed small bedrooms with the latticed windows, opening off the narrow halls with the unexpected turns and steps up or down. The delicious country fare, the unostentatious yet adequate service. Margaret had stayed in many ambitiously conceived country places, in the midst of every sort of show of wealth, but never had she felt toward even the most truly beautiful of these as she felt toward little Crossways. After all, though, was it Joan herself who really gave Crossways its title to exceeding and unusual interest? No, though undoubtedly she enhanced that interest. It must be that the place had been loved and cherished beyond most lived in by people like the Dares; they had built themselves and their ideas into every cubic inch of it; something of themselves remained behind them when they left it.

Margaret hadn't written or cabled Joan that she was coming. She had a curious feeling that she wanted to take her friend unawares and see what came of it.

The invitation was secure enough to count on, without asking to have it renewed.

"I'll not have people staying with me," Joan had assured her when they parted. "I'm much too busy and selfish to fill up my summer with guests. Except as Sher and Hugh drop in, or bring some other friend, or I ask someone for the week-end on the impulse, there's no schedule, no bookings. So if you decide to come, all you have to do is to come. The little room you had under the eaves will be ready for you without notice."

So, on a June evening, Margaret arrived at Crossways. She hadn't even telephoned out. She had hired a car with its chauffeur from one of the agencies which supply such service at a moment's notice, and had had sufficient luggage put in to insure her comfort for some days, leaving behind a big wardrobe trunk to be forwarded when she should be fully decided to remain. She looked, she was fully aware, infinitely the better for the trip to Paris. Perhaps she was more exquisitely clothed, certainly more artfully, than ever before; her fair skin was in perfect condition, her hair a marvel. In so far as these matters could lift her spirits, she was, for the hour at least, feeling something like a real interest in her arrival. If there was one place in the world where she felt that she could bear to go on for a while with what she thought of as

her thwarted life, it was at Crossways and with Joan Dare.

"Stop quietly outside the hedge, please," she ordered, "and wait while I go in."

The sound of singing—men's voices—met her as she came through the hedge gate and closed it behind her. The evening was clear and warm, the windows of the brown-wainscotted living room were all open. Margaret paused before one of them, looking in through the vines which bordered it, to see who might be there. Curiously enough, she felt a real and unwonted excitement stirring at the sound of these voices.

Sherman Dare sat at the small grand piano at one end of the room. He was not pounding out, man fashion, an accompaniment to the men's voices; he was playing like a musician. Sitting on the bench beside him, facing the opposite way, Joan was perched, a violin in her hands, on which she was playing, if not like a virtuoso, at least with sufficient skill to prove her training also musicianly. Here and there about the room the others were disposed, and four, including Sherman himself, were singing. Hugh McNair astride a chair; Bob Ramsey sitting on a corner of a table with his feet dangling; a tall young man whom Margaret did not at first recognize, who leaned against the chimney piece, with one hand in

his pocket. There was one other man, whose face was hidden by the wing of the big chair in which he sat, his white-flannelled legs comfortably crossed, one swinging foot keeping time to the music. Above the high back of the chair the top of his head could just be seen. One woman was in the room—a pretty, plump person with gray hair and a young, rosy face. She was wearing a plain white dress, such as does not come from Paris, but which suited her admirably. She was smiling as she listened, and also keeping time to the vigorous music with one well-shaped hand upon the arm of her chair.

The quartette sang surprisingly well. Sherman was informally and efficiently conducting as well as playing and singing, indicating the desired tempo, volume, and phrasing with motions of his head, waves of one arm momentarily disengaged, and occasional warning "*Sh-h-h-sh*" sounds accompanied by a lifted chin and a scowl. The voices were good ones, especially the second tenor of the quartette, which came, Margaret soon discovered, from the tall man who stood by the chimney piece. His face looked slightly familiar to her. Where had she seen those deep-set eyes, that profile like that of a bronze statue come to life, with the strong nose and chin? Why—the man was Joan's carpenter! . . . Life at Crossways was certainly democratic, the eavesdropper reflected.

The music ceased, upon the very breath of a tone,

and effectively. But the conductor at the piano was far from satisfied.

"If you *will* all hang around the edges of the room," he grumbled, "instead of forming breastworks by the piano, how can you expect to get any sort of unity? Move up and close in!"

Nobody moved. Joan laughed. "But that's the way they're going to do it in the play, Sher," she said. "What's the use of insisting on close formation?"

"Every use. They should practise properly, to get their balance. Move up and close in, I say!"

Nobody moved. "Cut it, Sher," advised McNair. "It's a hot night, and we've got the play to go over again. I'm not going to sing another note to-night. My throat feels like a raw beefsteak."

"That's because you yelled your head off at that ball game, not from singing," Sherman retorted.

Margaret chose this stormy interval in which to walk in at the open door, which gave into a hall almost a part of the living room. She stood in the inner doorway, smiling over at Joan, who saw her instantly.

VIII

"PEGGY FAULKNER!" Joan was across the room in a flash. "Oh, how glad I am you've come! And at just the right moment to meet our friends."

The lounging men, beforetime disobedient to their musical leader, now were galvanized into propriety. They stood at attention, they began to move up into approximately the close formation Sherman had commanded in vain. This very lovely person in the doorway, looking as though she had stepped out of some modern artist's portrait of a reigning beauty, held all eyes, and small wonder. The delicate breath of a perfume so subtle as to seem but an emanation from an alluring personality floated from her. In colour, in line, in effect—everything about her was sheer perfection. Her presence, in its utter simplicity and complete sophistication, was Parisian to the last detail, as Joan recognized at the first glance.

Joan presented Margaret to the gray-haired woman, who seemed not in the least overshadowed by the arrival of the guest. "Aunt Olivia" was the possessor of an interesting individuality of her own,

which no home-made white frock could disguise. Sherman Dare and Hugh McNair came up and enthusiastically renewed their acquaintance. Joan made known the other three, beginning with the eldest, the tall man with a distinguished-looking face, and a slight touch of gray in his hair at the temples, whom she called "Mr. Fullerton."

Margaret smiled at him, and he stood gazing intently at her after his ceremonious bow, which he followed by taking the hand she held out to him.

"Miss Faulkner! This is a great pleasure—and a thorough surprise," he said.

"How very nice to meet you here," Margaret answered simply.

The two acknowledgments could hardly have been more usual or less betraying of former acquaintanceship beyond the ordinary, yet somehow Joan was sure she knew that here was the man whom Peggy Faulkner wanted and couldn't have. Margaret was too well trained a young woman of the world to give her friend the smallest sign that anything had happened to disconcert her, yet that she was actually disconcerted, frightened, almost wanted to run away, Joan divined.

"If it's Lane Fullerton, no wonder," thought Joan. "Of course she can't have him—no woman can. That's hopeless, and she might as well give it up first as last. But how in the world did she ever come to

think she could? He *couldn't* have given her any real reason."

Margaret gave her own winning smile to Christopher Rand, the carpenter, and to Robert Ramsey, the author and playwright. Both responded with the deferential recognition beauty always commands, with the difference that Rand's was passive, Ramsey's active, as befitted the men. The carpenter was surprisingly self-possessed in the presence of the lady, his bow a little stiff, but his lean face breaking into a smile. The playwright was immediately and characteristically enthusiastic.

"Look here," he cried, turning to Joan, "why isn't this a gift from heaven? Why couldn't Miss Faulkner take Genevieve Harmon's part? There isn't one chance in forty Gen can come through and play it, after being floored for these two days. It's a corking excuse to get Miss Faulkner into it, and she looks the part as Gen never can. Let's ask Miss Faulkner to read the lines while we're going over it."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Ramsey. But I never did a bit of acting in my life," Margaret protested.

"No? My dear Miss Faulkner, this from the sex we are given to understand do nothing but act from the Kindergarten up? With your marvellous fitness for the part bestowed on you by kind Nature?"

As he attempted to do this daring piece of juggling, Ramsey glanced at Lane Fullerton. He got back an

almost imperceptible yet quite unmistakable shake of the head, which made him pause in full flight. He couldn't ignore Fullerton's opinion, and he had it in that gesture. Fullerton was a publisher, a critic, and his good friend, giving him time and consideration because something in the work of the young playwright had arrested his attention.

"Anyhow"—Ramsey capitulated reluctantly, and temporarily, to the signal of warning—"we'll appreciate it a lot if you'll read the part, Miss Faulkner, while we go over the act."

IX

JOAN, you *know* I can't do it. You must get me out of it. I never could act at school—you know that. I should spoil the whole thing."

Margaret sat on the edge of her bed, all pink and white in lace and silk. She looked to Joan like a frightened child.

In a loose bath gown over her pyjamas, Joan was perched on the window sill, with her head half out into the warm darkness of the June night.

"I'm afraid you would, Peg," was her frank answer. "Hardly anybody could get up the part at this late hour. And it can't be spoiled—it means too much to Bob. Don't mind, will you? Genevieve Harmon plays it none too well, but she's had a lot of coaching, and there isn't time left to coach you. If she really is seriously ill, as she seems to be, Mr. Fullerton will move the universe to get a professional to take the part."

"I'm glad. And of course I don't mind. I shouldn't even have read the lines to-night, if Mr. Ramsey hadn't insisted."

"You couldn't refuse, and it was nice of you.

Bob's terribly excited over the whole try-out, especially with Lane Fullerton looking on. If only that one of the three one-act plays really gets over, Bob will be out of his head for joy. Of course, it's wonderful to have a knowing person like Lane Fullerton even take an interest in a thing to be done in a country barn. It's evidence enough that he has his eye on Bob as a promising playwright, quite aside from the friendship between the two. Of course, Mr. Fullerton is really giving himself a little vacation up here in the country, which he's fond of, but even so, it's mostly on Bob's account that he's taking it just now."

"You seem to know Mr. Fullerton very well, yourself." Margaret lay back among her pillows as she spoke, and her head was turned away.

"Yes, he's one of Father's and Mother's friends I've inherited. For years he's been dropping in at Crossways."

"He can't be as old as they."

"Not more than a few years younger. He's really a sort of uncle to me. He always calls my mother 'Sister.' She adores that almost romantically handsome face and profile of his—she's painted a dozen portraits of him. Father's made two or three busts of him. Oh, he's so used to being admired he really doesn't notice it any more. There was a time, I used to think, though of course I was too young to be a

judge, when he was a good bit cocky over himself. But that time's past. He's really sincere and simple now, if you can say that of anybody who knows his world as he does. I mean, of course, that he's passed the stage of affectations and attitudes and sees life through eyes that aren't bleary with intoxication. Of course, Bob's still are."

"Is he cynical?—Mr. Fullerton, I mean?"

"To a certain extent, naturally. But not devastatingly so. As a matter of fact, he has every reason to be much more so than he is. There's a certain saneness in him that saves him—I think he gets it from that glorious old actress, Mrs. Dane Fullerton, who was his mother. If it hadn't been for her—she died only two years ago—his life would have been ruined by his fearfully unhappy marriage. It did make him, now that it's over, absolutely confirmed in his vow never to marry again. But, as every woman knows, such vows can be broken. Only—I don't think his will be for a long time, if ever."

She had conveyed to Margaret the knowledge she felt should be in her friend's possession, and after that she turned the talk and presently went away. The hour was very late, and the coming day was to be busy.

X

DAWN was but just beginning to flush the eastern skies next morning when Joan jumped out of bed and into her tub. Ten minutes later, she slipped down the front stairs, wearing riding clothes, and let herself out of a side door. Just outside it she came upon a long figure stretched in a deck chair, and paused in astonishment.

"Lane Fullerton! . . . What's the matter? Was this one of your white nights?"

Fullerton sat up, passing his hand over his heavy hair with its premature touches of gray at the temples.

"I believe I've been asleep several hours, really. It was mighty comfortable here. I can't conceive a nicer place than Crossways, out or in, in which to allow myself a week's real vacation."

"And I woke you. I'm so sorry."

"No, you didn't. I've been watching the dawn come up—not at all like thunder. More like an unseen hand gently drawing a pink-and-silver veil over the sky. It's been worth it.—But why are you up at this hour? You don't have white nights?"

"This last one was rather a pale gray. I thought a gallop before breakfast would freshen me. Don't you want to come along?"

"I'd like it immensely. Haven't anything here to ride in."

"That's easy. Run up to Dad's room, open his clothespress door, and you'll find breeches and boots. Meanwhile, I'll make a pot of coffee. Sneak into the dining room in ten minutes and you'll find it ready."

"Make it strong as Satan, will you, please? My head's rather unsteady."

Joan made the coffee black, reflecting upon the undoubted fact that the men had gone to bed much later than the women. When Fullerton joined her, his brows were drawn with pain.

"This will send it." She gave him an odd look. "Of course—if you men think it's worth it—to carry it so far——"

"We don't, exactly—especially when Bob Ramsey's around. I take very little, Joan, as a rule, and none at all last night, if you want the truth. This coffee'll make me fit in ten minutes. Forget my ails, and tell me how well your father's things fit me."

Joan laughed. "Skin-tight—I hope they don't split. Ready? Sure you don't want a sandwich?"

"Nothing but this, thanks."

They went over the grass to the old barn, saddled

Patsy and Nick, and were off at a walk which made almost no sound. Nevertheless, one saw them go. . . .

"Mind if I don't talk?" Joan asked, as they began a canter which led through a woody stretch. A spot of yellow sunlight glowed at the distant farther end, like the headlight of a coming train in a tunnel.

"I should mind if you did. My head's too thick."

"Good. Mine's too thin. And I shouldn't have brought you along if I hadn't been sure you'd prefer silence."

It was to be a hot day, but as yet the June warmth was acceptable. After the wood, the road climbed steadily till it reached almost the top of a high hill. Here the two horses stopped as if drawn by a common rein.

"It's still better, just up that path," Joan considered. "Mind one final pull, Pats?"

Patsy essayed the final pull, which was steep. Nick scrambled after him. At the summit, horses and riders were hidden from the roadway, a hundred yards distant, by a knot of brush out of which grew two stumpy pines. A view of half the horizon was to be had from this point.

Joan slipped off her horse and pulled the bridle reins over his head, Western fashion, at which he began to crop the sparse grass. Fullerton sat still in the saddle, considering the wide fields and hills before him, bathed in the early light, the shadows long.

Joan strolled away to a flat rock, upon which she took her seat, her knees drawn up and her arms clasped about them. She wore no hat, and her skin was both flushed and tanned. Her profile, sturdily cut and full of character, yet softened by full lips like flower petals, stood out against the green of the shrubs beyond her. For ten minutes neither spoke.

Then Fullerton dismounted, tied Nick, less trustworthy than Patsy, to a branch, and came across to Joan. Beside the flat rock was a patch of mingled grass and moss, and he laid himself down upon this, stretching out to full length, and lying with arms crossed above his head so that they shaded his eyes, staring up into the deepening blue. And still no word was said.

Finally, however, Fullerton stirred, turned over on his side, propped his head on his hand with one elbow deep in the grass, and lay looking up at his companion. In her riding clothes, with her uncovered head, her tanned face, her straight back and sturdy shoulders, she was still not unfeminine, though everything about her expressed readiness for action and youthful power in action.

"Joan!"

"Yes?"

"You're one woman out of a thousand."

She laughed. "Of course I'm not. Say that because I can be silent?"

"Not exactly, though that counts heavily. Some women can be silent, but it's the stillness of the watching cat."

"How do you know I'm not watching like a cat? You can't tell merely because I don't seem to be looking at you. I may be consumed with curiosity."

"Are you?"

"I'm sorry you didn't sleep."

He smiled. "By your own confession, you didn't sleep either. Can we be worried about each other?"

"Do you think our problems, if we have them, can possibly touch?"

He considered it. "They might. We've been friends a good while. Even when you were quite a young girl, you began to be my friend in a rather extraordinary way. I used to be amused and touched by your solicitude when you thought me unhappy. You've no idea, Joan, what a comfort you were to me in days that were—pretty black, though you could have had, then, no possible idea as to the cause."

"You were a sort of god to me, then," Joan confessed. "My idea was that such a radiant being should be untouched by trouble. Now—I know that you're not a god, and that trouble is inevitable. Still—I've been hoping you were past the worst of that particular blackness."

"I am and am not. The fringes of it still cast shadows and obscure the way.—Hullo! Look who's here!"

It was Blimp, dashing up the hill, arriving upon the scene with the air of one who, though unavoidably belated, is positive of forgiveness and a welcome. Panting with the long run, he dropped upon the ground at Joan's feet, gazing up at her and evidently congratulating her upon having so valiant and faithful a dog as himself.

"Runaway, who told you you might? Don't you know we came up here to be alone with the universe?" Joan caressed the sleek head and upstanding small pointed ears as do dog-lovers even when absorbed in other matters.

"Blimp's idea is that the universe is his also. 'I am his Highness' dog at Kew; Pray tell me, sir, whose dog are you?' That's in his eye as he looks at me, while lying at your feet.—Well, Blimp, take care how you lie at the feet of any woman. Even so neat a foot as that may administer a kick some day!"

"He knows it won't, cynic. Is there no trust left in the world?"

"Not much. Still—I think I'd trust you, Joan, if anybody—unless some Jonathan I'd tried out through long years."

"What about me in the rôle of Jonathan himself, David? I swear I could play the part. Especially in riding breeches. Look me in the eye and tell me I'm not trustworthy!"

He did it. Steady dark-lashed blue eyes to coolly searching gray eyes, they faced each other. Then Fullerton's long, slim fingers, whiter by many shades than Joan's, came upon hers. She turned her hand over to meet his, and the clasp was long and strong. His look at her, though smiling, was searching.

"You're more of a Rosalind than a Jonathan, Joan. After all, though you play the man, you are the woman."

"And so—disappointing?"

He got up and came to sit beside Joan upon her rock, where he didn't face her. The crop in his hand began to flick at the tall, coarse grass which surrounded the rock.

"Never that. But—well, I'll test you!"

He was silent again for a little. Then:

"To begin with, would you mind telling me how you came to ask Margaret Faulkner here? I didn't even know you knew her. She doesn't seem in the least your sort."

If the question startled her, she didn't show it outwardly. But if at that instant he had put his finger on her pulse he would have felt it jump like a wild thing. She did have to wait for a long minute before she could be sure her manner of answering could be her own somewhat boyishly matter-of-fact one.

"Knew her at school. Always liked her. Charmed by her beauty—we all were, those days. The sort of

rich girl who wasn't in love with herself, so one could find common ground with her."

"Did you and she find common ground? I should hardly have expected that."

"Why not? People don't have to be alike to find plenty of it. There was always a peculiar appeal about Peggy Faulkner. Though I hadn't seen her for a long time until a few months ago, I found myself interested in her in quite the old way. So I asked her out here, partly to renew the old friendship, partly because——"

Joan paused. This was hard going—a rough road upon which she suddenly found herself. After being for an hour on the mountain-top of silent yet deeply congenial companionship, to have to plunge down the rocky path of trying to be fair to another woman with a man whose interest she herself wanted exclusively—well—it took her best effort. Curiously enough, Joan hadn't really known she wanted Lane Fullerton's exclusive interest until this moment. She had been so secure in his friendship, in the supposed knowledge that he would rather have her friendship than the love of other women, since past experience had so embittered him, it was a shock to have him begin to question her about Margaret Faulkner. He almost never talked about women. Books, music, plays, people as people, men as men, seldom women as women. She had often noted the omission.

He was waiting. Joan went on, with some hesitation: "I don't know that I can tell you. Except, perhaps, that I wanted to help her find herself, if she could. I thought she'd come to one of those places in life where one is puzzled, baffled, unhappy, uncertain what to do next. Anyhow, she seemed to me terribly bored with her sort of life, and I suggested she might like to try mine for a little."

"Try yours? I can't imagine her enjoying that. Your life out here is full of an ideal combination of work and play—for you. But she has no work, and doesn't know much about your sort of play—does she?"

"I'm going to teach her—to ride and swim and shoot."

"Do you really think you can do that?"

She looked round at him. "You seem to know Peggy pretty well. When you met her last night, I thought she was only a casual acquaintance."

"I know her fairly well," he admitted. "Yet perhaps I don't, after all, if she can be contented here. I hope she can. It might do much for her, to stay here for a time with you. I'm really delighted to find you are friends."

Joan felt her heart sinking lower and lower, and sternly admonished herself to play up properly. Here was Lane Fullerton talking about a woman, at last—a woman not an actress or artist or poet, or anybody whom his own profession would cause him to take

note of; one whose principal claim to his interest lay in her beauty, charm, and wealth—the type of woman whom he had been so long avoiding, or seeming to avoid. Joan felt as if she herself hadn't really had his confidence, after all, since he knew Margaret Faulkner so well and had never once mentioned her—yet had given Peggy herself some sort of reason to think he cared about her.

"She's really very lovely," Joan forced herself to say, in a warmly cordial tone. Her own code of honour had for one of its clauses, "Belittle no woman to a man." In the first place, it wasn't fair, and Joan loved fairness in man or woman; and in the second place, it didn't accomplish the end it was meant to, or if it did, the end proved to be not worth the descent to meanness. "And can be lovelier," she went on gallantly, "if she has something to light her up. A really stimulating, absorbing interest."

"I agree with that. And you think she can find it here?"

"Well—I think I might lay the fires for some torch to touch off. I mean, of course, by making her more physically fit to get the most out of life."

"She looked to me, last night, marvellously fit."

Joan bit her lip. Even Lane Fullerton, experienced and sophisticated, hadn't recognized the philtres and powders and perfumes which had gone to the making of that radiant skin and hair.

"Regular exercise in the open air is a restorer of nerves, a builder of resistance," she pointed out. "And none of us can be too well equipped in those ways. Of course, I don't want to make Peggy into an Indian like me. We'll stop short of that."

"I should advise it." Then, as she laughed, saying more gaily than she felt, "Thank you, David," he answered pointedly, "You see! When one really treats a woman like a man——"

"She resents it? Well, then—I vow I don't resent it. I'll take all that goes with the Jonathan rôle, just so you don't look for holes in it."

"All right, then—I won't." There was a little interval of silence; then Fullerton took a letter from his pocket. "This is what kept me awake," he said.

He read it to her. They discussed it. It was an extremely complicated matter of business, having to do with a London publishing house and its relations with his own. It involved not only the two houses, but it threatened personal friendships of long standing, and it was concerning these that Fullerton was most unhappy. Though Joan was keenly aware of her own unfitness to advise him, she gave him the listening ear which, quite as much as advice, helps one who turns over a problem to make clear to himself his own views. When the talk ended, the two got up together, Fullerton noting with astonishment how late the hour had grown.

"Time goes fast in your company, Jonathan," he observed, as he seized his horse's bridle and the cavalcade started down the hill. "Even though you are a youth in breeches, you absorb my attention so I lose track of time."

Blimp dashing ahead, as one who could have told them long ago that they were overdue, they let Nick and Patsy take a fast canter, and presently came in at Crossways' rear gate as though they were eager to return. Joan, running into the house to change her habit for, she couldn't tell why, the most attractive morning frock she owned, felt as though she had exchanged her own light heart for Margaret's presumably heavy one. But she went whistling up the stairs, just the same. Joan's heart never had been, and never would be, exposed upon her sleeve.

XI

DRESS rehearsal—the night before the production of Robert Ramsey's three one-act plays, in which Lane Fullerton, as friend and critic, was deeply interested. If but one out of the three got across the footlights, it would be well worth all the time and trouble spent.

The footlights with all the rest of the complicated lighting were wired into the stage which had been built across one end of a great new barn. For weeks Bob had superintended the turning of the bare spaces into a theatre. Christopher Rand had been his right-hand man, and a clever electrician from New York his left. The result was satisfying—almost startling. Draperies took the place of scenery for the most part, after the modern fashion; spotlights and floodlights produced gorgeous or sombre colourings at will.

After all, and against Fullerton's judgment and her own fears, Margaret Faulkner had been persuaded to attempt the part for which Bob insisted she was the only conceivable one. Now that he had seen her, he could brook having no other act the rôle of *Arlenne*. He had carried his point with a high hand.

"Good Lord, I'd have *written* the thing for her, if I'd ever glimpsed her beforehand," he cried. "She can't help doing it as I want it done, when she looks as if the play'd been built around her."

"I'm afraid she can help it, and will. You're carried away by her extraordinary beauty," was Fullerton's opinion.

"Well, if I am, the audience will be. Throw away a chance like that? If you had Helen of Troy step out before you ready to play Helen of Troy, you wouldn't insist on having some understudy who couldn't look the part let you down, would you?"

"You're excited, old man, and your judgment's warped. Your *Arlenne* hasn't stepped out before you to play *Arlenne*, only a very attractive person who looks like her. You've made *Arlenne* a creature of fire and flame. Miss Faulkner is—well, call her an enchanting glow, not too brilliant."

"You *are* a cold-blooded frog, Fullerton." It was not the diplomatic manner wise in playwright to present critic and possible publisher, many years older than himself. But Bob was even more excited than he looked, and his appearance was quite enough to give him away. "Can't help it—going to have her, if I can make her do it."

When he succeeded in getting her to study the part, he was wild with joy. To Margaret it could hardly help being flattering, to have an eager young

genius imploring her to do it—for his sake, for art's sake, for heaven's sake—for anything she pleased. But a week of time remained when she began to work upon the script. As for the actual number of lines to be learned, the task wasn't hard; anybody with an ordinary memory could have done it—a professional actress in an hour. The stage business was harder, but it was laid out for her down to the smallest detail, not a step or gesture left to her imagination. Bob neglected everything to coach her, and at all hours the pair could be found rehearsing. She gave herself eagerly to the attempt to do and be all he wanted of her.

Joan, who had been begged to listen to one of the later rehearsals—the play was *The Marriage of Minds*, and Bob himself was playing the other of the two rôles called for—found herself wondering what really was the matter. By now Margaret was letter perfect; she had mastered every turn of the head, drop of the voice, motion of the arm, required of her. And still something was lacking—Joan knew it. And Fullerton, coming in unexpectedly and remaining out of sight of the actors, knew it, too, as he had known it all along. What was it?

The play was subtle, unquestionably; amazingly so, taking into account the youth of the playwright. Or was it perhaps the playwright's youth that accounted for the daring of his conception? In the action

of the play, everything depended upon the unmistakable indication of a peculiar and mounting mingling of spirit with spirit. Opening with a situation fleshly enough, it step by step freed itself of this, departed from it, became touched with the white fire of a superhuman oneness of sympathy almost inconceivable—yet not quite. This was where Margaret failed. Robert Ramsey's playing made his appealing fancy actually convincing. Margaret's was not—apparently could not be made—even imaginable.

"How could he have done it?" had been Joan's wonder from the hour when he had first read it to her, and had then made her read it with him. Exalted by the exquisite unearthly passion of his vision, he had outdone himself. Yet Bob Ramsey was no spirit; essentially he was of the earth, even when the fires of his imagination burned purest. Often their burnings were by no means pure, as Joan well knew. He could be weakly human and unsound to the core.

"Have to be either drunk or doped to do my damnedest," was the sort of thing he would say to her.

"Then I don't see——"

"Of course you don't see, old dear. My brain takes wings and soars highest sometimes when my body's lying in the ditch. You understand a lot—more than any girl I ever knew—but you can't understand that.

Never mind. You don't need to. Just thrill to the touch of my fire, and that's all I ask."

She had thrilled to it when she first heard *The Marriage of Minds*. It had even thrilled Fullerton, who, though responsive to the finger tips to the genuine, was sensitive to those same finger tips to flaws, forced cadences, false notes. He had suggested Joan for the part of *Arlenne*, but Bob had set his heart on Joan's doing something quite different, in a play of Russian derivation and conception, for which he thought her supremely fitted. Since it had been planned that no actor take a leading part in more than one of these three one-act plays, Genevieve Harmon, attractive and accomplished, trained in college dramatics, had been chosen. She had been approaching the best that Bob had thought he could expect of an amateur, when her illness had taken her off the list.

And now the last rehearsal, in full costume, was on. Margaret had dressed, trembling and doubting. She was now sitting down in front with Bob and Lane Fullerton watching Joan dash through the high-keyed, poignant scene in which she was giving "all she had"—Bob's favourite phrase when he wanted to whip people into action and call out all their reserves. Bob, beside Margaret, was exulting.

"Isn't she the little devil I painted her?" he whispered, his breath hot in Margaret's ear. "An angel of a devil—and a devil of an angel—she's all that. Oh,

Joan has the divine spark—no doubt of it. And Rand does surprisingly well, in his quiet way, which is what we want. He's the foil for her—the village carpenter. Oh, my unsaintly soul, what a thing it is—these approaches to getting inside one another's skins we sometimes make!"

Margaret wasn't listening. She was trembling more violently than before. She didn't know what was the matter, but she couldn't control it. Her hands were like ice, her memory seemed gone. She couldn't even recall the first words she was to speak. And this—in vain she tried to remind herself—this was only the last rehearsal. There was no audience beyond those who had been present all along at rehearsals, except two or three middle-aged women whom Joan's Aunt Olivia had asked leave to bring with her, because they had been making some of the costumes. To-morrow night the great barn would be packed—not only with the village people. Others were coming out from New York. There would be newspaper men—two well-known critics—friends of Lane Fullerton's. Oh, why—why had she ever consented to try to be one of the Minds which were to be Married!

If the idea had been wholly ironic, it wouldn't have been so difficult; but Bob Ramsey had somehow infused into the play his own declared belief that it might happen—that such a wholly spiritual union was possible. To convey this, without making it

ridiculous . . . Somehow, suddenly, Margaret knew that, last moment though it was, she mustn't attempt it—mustn't run the risk of ruining it all for him. If he hadn't been so blinded by her physical beauty, he would never have persuaded himself that she could play a part which demanded an incredibly sympathetic perception of delicate shades of meaning and their expression. Suppose—oh, horrible—they should laugh at it! . . . He—why, he would want to choke her silent with his own hands, it all meant so much to him.

Joan, running down off the stage in her Russian reds and blues, caught sight of Margaret's face just before her nervous state got the better of her self-control.

"Peggy!—Get some water, somebody, quick!—Let her head down, Bob—don't hold her on your shoulder like that. Poor dear—she must be tired out—or really ill!"

It lasted but a minute, the unconsciousness—it was hardly that. The splash of water on her forehead—the trickle of it on her lips—Bob's flask out and offering her a swallow of liquid fire. She tried to sit up and smile.

"It was nothing—I'm so ashamed."

Bob made her lie back again, somebody's coat under her head.

"Needn't be ashamed. We've been working you

like Pegasus at the plough!" he groaned. "Damn the play! Forget it. We won't rehearse it to-night. It'll go all the better to-morrow night."

Lane Fullerton stood watching. Margaret had perhaps never looked lovelier than as she lay there. She had dressed but hadn't made up for her part—there were no smudges of grease paint to mar her. There was a white terror in her face which made her appealing.

"We'll take you home, dear," Joan promised, kneeling beside her. "You need a long night's sleep, and then you'll be all right."

"I won't be all right." She breathed it in Joan's ear. "I can't do it—*I can't!*"

"Forget about it to-night, Peggy, as Bob says. Everybody gets stage fright the last rehearsal."

They wouldn't let her talk. They took her back to Crossways, and Joan and Aunt Olivia put her to bed, making light between them of the breakdown, but secretly worried. It really looked as if it were more than a case of stage fright which could be overcome; it was the sort of conviction of unfitness which makes action impossible. Why it had happened, nobody knew.

XII

DOWNSTAIRS, the men talked the situation over. Bob's face was nearly as white as Margaret's had been. With a cigarette hanging from the corner of his lips, his ice-cold hands shoved into his pockets, he was raging up and down the long room. Sympathetic but trying to be hopeful, the others did their best to quiet him.

"She'll snap out of it, old man." But Sherman didn't believe it.

"I'll go up in smoke if I can't put that play over. She's *got* to do it! I'll dope her——"

"See here, Bob." It was Hugh McNair, whose head was usually cool, however hot other people's grew. "Keep your hair on. If it comes to the pinch and she can't make the grade, poor girl, Joan can do it."

Bob stopped in his tracks, scowling at McNair. The other nodded, and Fullerton, appealed to by a look, assented.

"Joan's a good sport, and she probably knows the part absolutely. But—she can't look it." This was Sherman. Brothers seldom fully appreciate the powers of sisters.

"Make-up goes a long way," McNair urged. "Joan has a stunning personality. She's pretty brown, but that can be fixed. Her voice is capable of every shade of inflection. She can put that thing over, Bob—I'll guarantee it."

Bob sat down on a corner of the table, looking acutely miserable. But in his desperation the idea was gaining ground with him. He couldn't give up a thing upon which so many high hopes depended. He had been delighted with the way Joan had caught his meaning in the development of the play, when he had first read it to her. When they had gone over it together, he could have asked nothing of her more understanding than her rendering of his most carefully considered nuances. If Margaret hadn't come along, taking him off his feet with her shining presence, he might have been fully contented with Joan. As it was—— But he couldn't let Margaret go. He appealed to Fullerton.

"She's bound to get over this shake-up, don't you think? You've seen heaps of 'em, haven't you? And I've coached her till she can't go wrong, once she's started. A night's sleep——?"

"I'm afraid she mayn't sleep. And, Bob—Hugh's suggestion isn't a bad one. Why not let Miss Faulkner off and rehearse with Joan in the morning? Of course —and with all respect for Margaret's plucky attempt to do it—Joan has what she hasn't—the sensitiveness

to fine distinctions of interpretation that the play calls for. I've an idea, if you put her in, she'll astonish you to-morrow night."

Bob was still shaking his head, muttering imprecations, and all but crying when they led him off to bed. But morning brought with it the unappealable necessity. Margaret was as nearly ill as a horror of the whole situation could make her. It was unthinkable that she would be able to pull herself together. There was nothing to do but assure her that they could get along without her, and that, if she would rest on that, she might feel well enough by night to sit in the audience and see another lift the load that was too heavy for her. The relief of this nearly offset her humiliation, but it could hardly temper her regret for the sake of the unhappy playwright.

"I'm so sorry, Bob—I can't tell you——"

Palely she looked at him from among her pillows, and he tried to smile.

"It's not your fault, Peggy. I'm just—da—dis—disappointed."

"Joan will do it better."

"She can't. She's a gipsy. You're the princess, to the life."

"That's sweet of you. I wish I could have done it. I'm so—so sorry."

He patted her hand. He would have stooped down and kissed her if he had dared, but Aunt Olivia was

there, and Aunt Olivia, kind and clever village woman as she was, didn't understand crazy young playwrights whose strongest instinct was to allow themselves any relief to overcharged emotions which happened to occur to them. So he had to content himself with trying to act like a reasonable being, whose only course was to make the adorable creature who had failed him satisfied that she hadn't spoiled it all for him—as she had.

Downstairs, he went flatly through the play with Joan. She understood to the full how he was feeling, and his state of mind naturally didn't spur her to prove to him what she could do. Between them, they made of it something without life or light.

"We'll cut it out. Let the orchestra play slow music while some ass reads the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' with the two figures on it—eternally young—and eternally dead. Then I'll go out and drink till I pass out, and forget it. When I come to, we'll bury the play—in some forgotten graveyard."

"Bob." Joan faced him. Her storm signals were flying. "We'll not cut it out. I'll play it if I play it alone."

"You will, eh?" His laugh was bitter but appreciative. "Suppose I won't let you?"

"I will. I can *do* it alone."

He stared at her wretchedly. "You *are* a sport, old girl. Oh, well—we'll go on with it, of course. It might

do something pretty bad to Margaret to feel she'd killed it. We'll *both* take a nip, you and I, before we go on, and maybe we can get maudlin enough——"

"Stop it. Go away and soak your head, or something. You don't have to be a spoiled kid because things have gone wrong. '*Play up—play up—and play the game!*' You used to quote that at me—quote it at yourself."

He laughed, and suddenly flung one nervous arm about her shoulders. She wrenched herself away and ran out of the room. Instantly he knew that somehow she wouldn't fail him. At least, they wouldn't have to bury the play in any graveyard; it could stay on the earth, if not in the skies.

XIII

THE art of make-up is rather an astonishing one. Under the hands of a professional, Joan's tan seemed to melt away, and an enchanting fairness took its place. Her eyes were unusual—her greatest claim to beauty—and they were enhanced by splendid shadowings laid on with care. Her lips needed a bit of shaping, but her profile was of itself all that could be asked. The gown of the princess had to be let out in one or two places, but when it was on, no gipsy inside of it made it a misfit. Joan stood regally ravishing to behold.

Bob came dashing to the door of the big box stall which was serving Joan as a dressing room. He stood still, his face blazing with excitement.

"My lord, girl, I didn't know it was you!"

She laughed and came up to him. Her expression changed.

"You haven't been drinking too much again! Bobby—why *will* you, just when you want all your wits!"

"Just a nip—I couldn't hold steady without it."

"Swear you won't take another before we go on."

"Swear nothing. Except that I'll play up to you—take you off your feet. Why, you darling, you're glorious! See here, we'll *make* it go! Just——" he glanced hurriedly about him, but there were others in sight, looking at them—"Oh, if I could just kiss you once!"

"Hush! You'd get lipstick—this is the sort that comes off. And you don't need it. You'll be sufficiently in love with me—for the moment."

Her laughing, challenging eyes touched off the last needful tongue of fire in his brain. "Bless you, you wonder! Now I've seen you, I'm all right.—We go on in five minutes. Wish now I hadn't moved this up to second place instead of last, where it should be if it goes. But it's too late to change it, with you made up like this."

Margaret, recovered sufficiently to dress herself superbly, drink the aromatic spirits Aunt Olivia brought her, and be conveyed by Lane Fullerton in Joan's car to the improvised theatre gleaming with lights, had nothing to ask of the Fates. Not since she had come to Crossways had Fullerton's manner toward her so nearly approached that of the man she thought she had once known. She understood that he was sorry for her, but she couldn't help being confident that he was now interested in her again for herself, not merely as a figure on Robert Ramsey's stage. At least she had proved her spirit in trying

to do this thing—he must admire that. He had frankly said so.

"Try not to mind that you couldn't quite go through with it," he urged, as they sat waiting for the rising of the purple curtain, now gently swaying in the light summer night breeze which swept through the spaces of the barn. "You made a game attempt. This particular stuff of Bob's would try the soul of a finished actress—it calls for something not one out of a thousand players has to give. It might be impossible for the thousandth to get it across. It was small wonder you quailed."

"Then how can you imagine any amateur actress, even Joan, with all her cleverness, can do it?" She could hardly help asking the obvious question.

"Of course she can't—not as he conceives it. But she's so much of a genius herself, in her way, she understands exactly what he wants of her, and I've faith that she'll approach it, anyhow. It will be interesting to see."

Others in the audience thought Fullerton and Margaret Faulkner interesting to see. Neither noticed how they were observed, for both were too accustomed to such attention. In this audience, the greater part of which was from the near-by suburban towns, Fullerton's distinguished face and bearing, Margaret's beauty and her perfection of detail in dressing, stood out among the less sophisticated charms of

many of the other men and women. There were, however, more than one group of people in the place who rivalled these two in their look of the world outside. In all, perhaps, Ramsey could count in his audience at least a dozen who were of those who knew, who could judge his work as he wanted it judged. And there might be another twenty-five who could judge it from the standpoint of the super-intelligent audience, trained in all ways to recognize the best in amateur work because they knew the best in that which was professional, at home and abroad. Bob could have asked no better. His friends, including Fullerton, had worked efficiently to bring these people out into the country, promising them at least a moment or two of high delight. For that they had come.

One of Bob's three plays had already come and gone—a dextrous, roistering skit which had amused the audience and put them in good humour. Sherman, Hugh, Christopher Rand, and Bob himself had taken part in it, all in summer dress; they had had only to walk from floor to wings and so upon the stage. The play had ended with the rollicking music of the four—the quartette with Sherman conducting it from the piano precisely as he had conducted it in rehearsal. The human quality of it, the quips and quirks of a flashing wit, had been bound to make it a success.

Bob had always understood the art of getting laughs, and though he was contemptuous about this, to him, minor accomplishment, it stood him in good stead, since curtain raisers, like stimulants, must be spirit raisers as well, to be of use.

The curtain rose upon *The Marriage of Minds.* Fullerton leaned back now, watching intently, his arms folded. Margaret, beside him, felt afresh a bitter pang of regret that she couldn't be up there before him to be watched—if there was a chance that she could have made his cool gray eyes quicken into life. Why couldn't she have done it? But even if she hadn't been afraid, she knew, from almost the first word Joan spoke, that here certainly was one who, whether her ability had been discovered or not, could do it all.

Fullerton had forgotten Margaret—Robert Ramsey had forgotten her. Could this be Joan the gipsy, Joan the rider of horses, the whistler to dogs, even Joan the artist with the quick fingers and eager skill to capture whatever she might see to set down in her sketchbook? Could she be even Joan the hostess of Crossways, the friend of carpenters and cooks, the all-round young woman of the world? No, this Joan was the princess—the fascinating, lonely, starving princess, with the strolling poet at her door, offering her something matchless which she knew not how to take . . . yet learned to take. . . . And the scene, though

imaginative and daring to the last degree, was real, because she made it so.

The curtain fell—not upon wild applause, though there was plenty of that after an appreciable delay which was its own tribute to that poignant moment which old critics find priceless enough to pay them for many dull hours before the footlights. Fullerton himself, though he had been familiar to boredom with every line of the play, had reacted to it as he had wanted to do and had feared he might not. It was good enough—it might even be very good. Anyhow, he knew that he would include it in a certain book of modern plays by promising young playwrights which he meant to publish soon, and in the selection of which he was being more critical than he had ever been.

"It was wonderful—it was perfect," murmured a voice beside him. He looked at Margaret—and had never noted finer generosity. Margaret's face was that, not of a defeated rival, but of a triumphant friend.

"It was. And you're more wonderful—to see it," he answered softly, out of his stirred consciousness of what the play had meant, might mean, to those who could make it live for themselves. He was almost at early middle life; experienced, worn with worldliness and cynicism; and yet this passionately idealistic little play had touched hidden springs of longing; dispelled, if only for the hour, old disbeliefs. Strangest of all, though the sight of his friend Joan's magic had

filled him with a proud admiration for her, the moment the curtain dropped, it was the woman beside him to whom his thoughts came back with a rush. Her mere presence there was unquestionably more disturbing than Joan's magic.

Princess make-up off—Russian costume on—the little orchestra, brought out from New York (Bob had taken no chances with amateur abilities), dropping into weirdly stirring Russian music, and Joan was on for the third play of the evening; she and Christopher Rand for the principals, with a few minors.

Down in the audience, people who knew Rand pricked up ears, strained eyes. They were village people whose village houses he had built.

"Well, well, Chris is coming along. Playing parts with Joan Dare."

"Why shouldn't he? He's as good as she is."

"He sure is. He's building that thing she calls a studio up on the hill back of the orchard. Clever of him—gets to know her well enough to be one of that crowd."

"Chris is no slouch. I'd say there isn't one of her bunch that can hold a candle to him."

Rand had the part of an American traveller stranded in communist Russia; Joan that of a young Russian servant in the house of the former nobility grown poor and starving. The play went with a rush

from the start—it was exciting, appealing, vivid, tragic. It ended with a shot from a revolver and the girl dying in the American's arms. Joan, keyed to a high pitch by her work in the other play, outdid herself in this one. Rand, catching fire from her, forgot himself, the audience, everything—except herself. The result brought the house down in a tumult of applause.

Two seasoned theatre-goers exchanged comments:

"That girl will bear watching."

"Play's nothing of itself. She makes it."

"Play's not half bad—she couldn't make it altogether."

Bob Ramsey rushed at Joan, in the wings.

"You've done it again, girl! That was *your* play—it fitted you. You were gorgeous! I'll have you on the real stage yet."

"Don't want to be, thanks, Bobby. Want to dance. Get the floor cleared in a jiffy, will you?"

"You bet I will. First dance?"

"Of course, if you like."

"Keep that costume on, eh? It's stunning."

"All right. Anything to please."

He laughed excitedly. "You can't do anything but please, to-night, it seems. When I think what I owe you——"

"You owe me nothing. I've had the thrill of my life. Run along and look after that floor, will you?"

XIV

THE chairs were rushed out of the way to the side lines as fast as twenty volunteering young men could politely disperse the groups of people who insisted on bothering them. The big spaces of the new barn floor had been waxed; the orchestra swung into the gaily persuasive strains of *Nobody Like You;* in no time the floor was full. A well-known critic was seen dancing with a pretty young matron from the village; Fullerton presented Chris Rand to a gay New Yorker who had avowed herself "crazy about him." Fullerton himself asked Margaret:

"Do you feel up to dancing?—I hope you do."

"Once, perhaps. I can't bear to miss trying a few rounds on a barn floor—that will be a new sensation. The place is really alluring in this lighting, isn't it?"

Joan, coming out from the box-stall dressing room to fox-trot with Bob, saw her two friends moving past her in the perfect form of the accomplished, apparently absorbed in each other. Fullerton was talking in Margaret's ear—her beautiful head, slightly lifted to him, held the pose of one who listens not to

miss a word. Bob saw them, too—looked after them as he fell into step with Joan.

"She's mighty game, isn't she? Nobody knows how she suffered over not being fit to go through with it. Must have hurt like blazes to see you walk off with the honours. You certainly did, Joan. I never can thank you. You saved my life. . . . But I can't help feeling sorry for Margaret. She's awfully generous, too. First thing she said to me just now was praise for you. She thinks you're a wonder—as we all do. She's almost as much of a one, to take it like that."

Well, it was the old story—Joan realized that. They all felt the same way. As she danced successively with Hugh, Sherman, Lane Fullerton, she got the same reaction from them all. They were proud of her, no doubt of it; they exulted in her triumph, they gave her full measure of praise. And then they fell to being sorry for Margaret, whom she had so dramatically eclipsed.

Of the four, Fullerton was most on his guard, but even he betrayed his sympathies.

"She's delightful about it. Not one of us really appreciated you more. You did astonish us, Joan. You can go far, my dear, if you have any ambition to do it. I say that as one whose business is picking flaws. The flaws were so slight I forgot to notice them. I say you can go far."

"I haven't—any desire—to go any distance at all.

Dramatics to me are like setting off fireworks on the Fourth: you fire them all off, and then are contented to do other things for a year. I shall be glad to get back on Patsy with Blimp at his heels, and forget the Russians."

"I want to have a long talk with you, Joan—some day soon."

"All right, David."

He smiled. "Thanks, Jonathan."

She was sure she knew what he wanted to talk about. He was still in a quandary over Margaret, she was somehow aware. The pull was strong—he was showing that. But there was a pull the other way: the old doubt as to whether he could be satisfied with that which could satisfy but one side of his nature. Margaret was not his intellectual equal, she couldn't even approach such a state.

"If he dances with her twice more to-night, he won't care whether she knows her A B C's," Joan thought, as another man claimed her, and she danced away with the newcomer, who hadn't met Miss Faulkner and had been bowled over by Joan's performance.

In due course, Christopher Rand came up to her. She had seen him dancing, mostly with the village girls—only twice with the New York girl who had frankly avowed herself "crazy about him." He danced well, he had seemed wholly at his ease with the others, yet, as he asked Joan for the coming num-

ber, he seemed all at once what Aunt Olivia would have called "diffident."

Immediately Joan was aware that he put his arm about her with a sort of awe of her. He had never allowed himself to use toward her the same carelessly cordial tone which she employed with him; he left between them a sense of a little distance which he would not cross, even though she did. She understood this, and liked him for it, even though she tried now and then to break it down. It was no lack of assurance that building houses and building them well wasn't as big a job as some—Rand believed in his work, she knew. She knew also that he every so often refused to build a house at all, if the plans didn't please him. He wouldn't have his part in making a community ugly or commonplace, he said. At such times he had the dignity of an exacting architect. He had the reputation in the village of spending hours of his evenings poring over books on architecture; he had been seen studying details in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and taking notes on them. The village called him "a coming young man," a phrase which in village parlance lifts a man to a certain eminence among his associates.

As Joan moved off with him, over her shoulder she caught another glimpse of Margaret with Fullerton. This was the third time they had danced together, then. And Margaret had spent the morning in bed,

the afternoon upon a couch, waited upon by Aunt Olivia. Fullerton's marked approval of her must be having the effect of a strong stimulant—as it naturally would, Joan had to admit. If it had been herself in the arms of that distinguished figure, which stood out among all the rest in the place as easily the most noteworthy, she was aware that she would have felt the same stimulation. Joan had to be honest with herself. She couldn't blame Margaret for being happy in this hour, so unexpectedly hers in spite of her disappointment. As for Joan herself, she was growing more and more weary of the whole thing. She wanted to go home and to bed, or off in the dark on Patsy. Yes, that would be better than bed. What was a dramatic triumph compared with a ride in the summer night on Patsy, if one couldn't be dancing beneath the gay lanterns, on a big, breezy barn floor with the man who interested one to the point of preoccupation? . . .

What was Rand saying? He hadn't spoken at all, as they made the first round of the big floor.

"Would you rather be outside? You must be tired—even you who never seem to tire. Who wouldn't, who'd pulled a thing over the top the way you have to-night?"

"I didn't do that. But I believe I am rather tired. Stayed awake most of the night being a princess, in advance of the appointed hour."

"I don't wonder. Shall we slip off when we get around to the big door? Or here—fewer people outside here, probably."

"Here" was a narrow doorway at one side, leading into an as yet unused paddock for the farm horses which were soon to be installed. Keeping up the step until they slipped through the door and closed it behind them, Rand had her out.

A small pile of left-over lumber had been placed against the barn. Rand found a seat for Joan and sat down beside her. He lighted a cigarette, drew one or two absent-minded whiffs, and let it burn out, while a silence fell which lasted for some time. Then he spoke in an undertone, slowly and with hesitations quite unlike his usual straightforward speech.

"I thought when I got you by myself I could tell you what I felt about your acting, in that strange play with Ramsey. . . . I'm afraid I can't. . . . I hadn't found much in it, when I heard it being rehearsed with Miss Faulkner trying to do what she couldn't do. When you did it—well, I guess I can't even try to tell you. . . . But it made me know one thing I hadn't known before. And that's that a fellow can be as crazy and as hard to put your finger on as Ramsey and still have—something in him that's pretty close to bigness. In his thoughts, I mean. . . . As if you stepped into a building that looked like a vaudeville theatre outside—and came into a church."

Joan turned her head and looked at him amazedly through the dim light.

"Bob would appreciate that," she said. "I wish you'd tell him. He needs to have somebody show him he can be understood like that."

Another silence. Then Rand again. Joan had never known him quite like this. She was used to his matter-of-factness, his reticences, his cool handling of problems. He seemed for once as nearly on tension as any of the actors of the evening, and they had all been strung taut.

"It was a lucky thing Miss Faulkner couldn't go through with it. . . . She couldn't have touched what you did. . . . She's beautiful, I suppose—everybody seems to think so. I like to look at her, as we all do at something made to look at by somebody who knows how. . . . But—I don't suppose you'd like to have me tell you just how *you* looked to me?"

There was a sudden shyness in his voice. Her heart was very sore, in spite of the praise that had been heaped upon her from all sides. The missing note—the missing note—that was what had made all the difference between exultation and disappointment. Of course, Christopher Rand couldn't supply it—nobody could except one, and he was dancing—with a girl who worshipped him.

"Yes, do tell me. I'd truly like to know, even if it's very bad to hear."

She heard him laugh softly. "That depends. Maybe you won't like it. But you looked to me like something just as beautiful in its way as that other girl—only—with this difference. . . . She's been made—she's a finished job. Nothing much can change her—she'll always be just what she is, with a little extra wisdom, maybe. But you . . ."

It took him a good while to get it out, and in the interval Joan found herself able to think almost exclusively of him and of what he was going to say, with only a dim vision in the background of her mind of the two figures dancing perfectly together against the background of the flowers and flags of the barn. She supposed she must be avid for flattery—that was what was the matter with her. Her cup, though overflowing with it, wasn't quite full enough for her. She was ashamed of being so insatiable, but she did want to hear what was about to be said, if he ever managed to say it.

He did manage; he had only waited till he could say it approximately as he wanted to.

"You looked to me like something that wasn't made—something that grew itself. . . . And grew and grew—and hasn't stopped growing—and won't stop."

She tried to take it lightly. "I sound like Jack's beanstalk," she murmured.

"No. Not so much growing tall, or growing broad.

Growing—light—bright . . . I can't express it—I don't know how. Giving out not only light but—warmth—life—for other people to get from you."

"Why, Chris——" She was amazed. Was this her carpenter, to whom she had lent so many books? He had read them, unquestionably; devoured them, as she knew. He bought books for himself, and many of them. But she had never dreamed, interesting though he had become to her, and assured as she was of the quality of his mind, that he could have an imagination like this. What he had said was—why, it was almost poetry. Certainly it—helped.

But immediately she made him go back with her to dance again. She couldn't risk staying with him in this strange mood. Nobody could tell what in an hour like this a carpenter might try to build.

When she fell asleep at last, that night—very near morning—it was with Lane Fullerton's face before her, as she had seen it when he said good-night to Margaret at the house. His expression had made her think of an old hymn she had heard Jenkins, pottering about her gardens, sing in a booming bass:

"*Almost persuaded . . .*"

XV

"JOAN, I'm sailing Saturday for Cherbourg. Just ran out to say good-bye."

It was a distinct shock. Since the night of the play, a week before, Lane Fullerton had not been seen at Crossways. A pallid and distrait Margaret had waited in vain for some word from the man who had seemed so absorbed in her up to the moment that he parted from her. Joan also had wondered, as the days went by, though not after so puzzled a fashion as Margaret. Joan was used to Fullerton's casual ways. When the Dares were at Crossways, he might come out twice within a week's time; or he might not be seen there for weeks on end. It was part of the charm of the place, he had said many times during the years of his friendship with Morton and Madelaine Dare, that nobody there ever called a man accusingly to account if he didn't appear every so often. For that very reason, he averred, he wanted to come much oftener than he should if the checking system had been in operation, as it was in so many places where he was made welcome.

"Oh, but we can't be bothered, Lane," Madelaine had said with her dazzling smile, "keeping scores.

That would spoil everything. One never cares for people who do that. Come when you like, and never when you don't like. Morton feels the same way."

"Only even more so," her husband had declared. "It's the one and only method, or lack of it, which keeps one's friends coming for love of coming, not to pay debts."

But this time, even Joan, who knew Fullerton's way so well, had expected him to come soon. On the night of the play he had returned to New York late, motoring in with Sherman and Hugh, who had business reasons for being at their office in the early morning. He had not said that he would be back at Crossways within a day or two, but his manner had all but declared his intention to return without delay. Yet he had neither come, telephoned, written, nor sent any token—box of flowers or package of books—as he often had, and which might have been expected from a guest to his hostess or to his hostess's guest. Instead, he now appeared without warning to Joan, writing letters at a desk in the library, in the middle of a rainy afternoon. Margaret was in her own room, presumably sleeping the dull hours away.

"Why, Lane!—But how like you! Only—it's short notice, isn't it?"

"Rather—yes. Cablegram Tuesday—booking last night—no time for amenities. But I thought I owed you a personal good-bye—and wanted to see you,

anyway, so I made time to come out in a friendly motor. Armstrong will stop for me within the hour."

"Nice of you. I'll call Margaret." Joan rose.

Fullerton detained her. "Not just yet, please. I want a little time with you, first."

Joan sat down again, smiling. Somehow, it was easier to play up than she had thought it would be. Perhaps the interval had braced her. "For that talk you said you wanted, the night of the play?"

"Did I say I wanted a talk?" An odd look set her thinking. "It must have been to tell you what I thought of the work you did on the barn stage. Really, Joan, you surprised even me, who thought I knew what was in you."

He went on to tell her, in careful phrasings, of his impressions of the three plays, and his conviction that at least one of them was the real thing. But not, after all, *The Marriage of Minds*, original and challenging to the imagination as it was. It was the third play, the one which she had acted with Christopher Rand. . . .

She wasn't listening to his words. She was hearing his well-modulated voice, noting his beautifully cut features, watching the occasional gestures of his shapely hands, with their long slim fingers, like an artist's. As he sat facing her, he had never seemed a more interesting figure, a more desirable friend. All the week she had been resigning him in her thoughts

to Margaret, trying to get used to it, fighting to overcome the jealousy of which she was somewhat ashamed, though she told herself it was reasonable enough. She hadn't expected him to marry anybody, for she knew his past history, and knew how little he had cared to try to replace the one woman for whom he had known a consuming passion. She had been satisfied with his friendship, since nobody else had more. But when it had begun to look strongly as though at last he did mean to fill that empty place in his life—and with Margaret Faulkner—then, indeed, Joan had been hard put to it to give him up with even seeming grace, to say nothing of the entire concealment of her own heavy heart which her gallant blood called upon her to achieve.

"Thank you—you know how I appreciate your praise, Lane. I don't deserve it, but it's none the less delightful. . . . Now tell me something of your plans, won't you? Shall you see my father and mother? They're in the Swiss Alps just now, I believe, but will be back in Paris by September."

"Then I'll certainly see them, of course. I may be over there for some months."

He told her of his business abroad, of the people he meant to see, and so on. Twice she got up to call Margaret, and twice, though he rose with her, he made her sit down again. But why, she wondered, since he seemed to be saying nothing of any special

importance? If he was to be called for within the hour, did he mean to give Margaret only the last moments of his flying visit? Finally she interrupted him to say:

"I *must* let Peggy know you're here. She mayn't be ready to come down at a minute's notice."

"Very well. Of course, I want to say good-bye to her. But come back yourself, please."

Joan sent a maid upstairs and returned. She couldn't understand him. But one thing was becoming momently clearer—he had nothing to say to Margaret which couldn't be said in five minutes, and before a friend. Joan's heart leaped.

"Traitor!" she said sternly to herself.

And at last Fullerton was saying something to be listened to.

"Joan—I'm a queer dog, I fear. But I can't change my ways. I want to go on, writing a letter to you now and then, dropping out here when I come back, thinking of Crossways as I do when I can't see it—as the dear place it is. I've a jolly little snapshot of you, with the dog Blimp, which I carry along with a few other treasures wherever I go. I'm going to leave you my banker's address; send me word now and then, won't you—as you always do—of anything special that happens to you? And—don't forget Lane Fullerton, whatever you do, for he loves you very much."

His smile warmed her heart. It wasn't lost, then,

the old sure friendship for which she cared so much. And he wasn't giving more than that to anybody else —not half so much, by all the signs. She knew well enough what those last words meant—he said them to her as he would say them to her father and mother. From him they meant a tried affection, that was all. Wasn't it enough? She was suddenly and strangely happy, anyhow. And then her heart sank again, at the soft sound of Margaret's footstep on the stairs. She must have been ready, quite ready, after all, to come down. Perhaps she had seen Fullerton arrive; perhaps she had been ready, just on the chance, the hope deferred that wouldn't down. Poor Peggy!—whose lights had been turned up so brightly, only to be extinguished.

Joan couldn't stay to see it. She made an excuse and slipped away as Margaret came in, returning only when, a very few minutes later, she heard a motor stop by the gate in the hedge.

The pair were standing, Margaret smiling very brightly with fixed lips, and responding, she whose poise was usually so perfect, with an over-vivacity to Fullerton's farewells:

"Indeed, yes, I shall remember these weeks so pleasantly; it was so nice to meet you here. No, I'll not be here much longer, I'm afraid—I've some invitations I mustn't refuse. If Joan hadn't been so sweet to me, I should hardly have stayed so long."

"Nobody forgets Crossways, I believe. I find it's always much harder to go from here when I'm sailing for some other land, than from my own quarters in town. Yet I always make this my last call before I go, for some unexplainable—no, quite explainable—reason. The Dares know what it is, and so do you, by now, having experienced their hospitality. It's like leaving home."

He shook hands warmly with Margaret and Joan, and went out through the still falling rain to the waiting motor, got in, leaned out the open window, waving his hat to the two who stood in the doorway. Then he was gone.

"I wonder how many times I've seen him go from Crossways," Joan murmured, as they turned back. She avoided looking at Margaret, who was starting toward the stairs, and busied herself with a needless rearrangement of some tall yellow poppies, crimson phlox, and blue delphiniums, in a big jar on the hall console. "Rather restless, in spite of his quiet manner, but tremendously loyal to my father and mother. And so to Sherman and me, for their sakes, of course. I think, having no family, he quite feels us to belong to him in that capacity."

Margaret didn't speak, and as she vanished up the winding stairs Joan knew it was because she could not.

A few days later, Margaret went away. They had

been difficult days, though Joan had done her honest best to make them easy. She had expected no confidences—how could Margaret tell her this thing? Margaret could have no reason to think Joan had divined that Fullerton was the man of whom she had told her. Why reveal it now, when only humiliation could go with the telling? Besides—hope springs eternal! Perhaps he had gone away to think things out by himself, his wary instincts and methods winning over the stirring of his blood. Joan didn't believe this, but she thought Margaret might. In any case, she was deeply sorry for her friend, though she herself was too human to be sorry that things had not turned out as she had begun to be sure they would.

A shining white-and-black limousine from a country place on the Sound came for Margaret; a station wagon followed to convey her luggage. The Paris frocks would have a chance, where Margaret was going, Joan reflected. And perhaps it would be easier, amidst the diversions of the gay set always thronging at the Hilliard Templetons', to cover a sore heart. Anyhow, Joan wished her luck.

"You've been wonderful to me, Joan."

"I haven't, Peggy. Just raced around the country on Patsy, or did sketches, or built houses, and left you alone."

"Indeed you haven't left me alone. Everybody's been charming, and I've had few idle hours. If I'm

not staying the whole summer, as you asked, it's because, I suppose, I'm restless, like Lane Fullerton. He says the loveliest place can't hold him when the longing for change comes upon him. We are much alike in that, we agreed. So he'll not be surprised that I write him from the Templetons' instead of Crossways. By the way, I've left the village post-office my change of address, but if by any chance letters are delivered here . . ."

"Of course I'll forward them, post haste. Lane's letters are wonders—one wouldn't want to miss a single one."

They parted on that note. All right, if it gave Margaret aid and comfort. Yet after she had gone Joan began to wonder if, after all . . . She knew well enough that Fullerton was capable of deep designs: could cover his intentions with a casual word and manner. Perhaps he really had gone away to think things out, and after having thought . . .

Ten minutes after the station wagon had disappeared, Joan was astride Patsy, with Blimp at their heels. Farm women ran to their doorways to stare after what seemed to be a runaway. The rapid pound of fleet hoofs, a flash of black flanks, a glimpse of a lithe figure bent over an outstretched sleek head, a rising, lengthening puff of dust—all passed before it could barely be discerned that the rider was that madcap girl from Crossways.

"She'll get hurt some day, that Dare girl. Maybe she wasn't bein' run away with that time. If she wasn't shows how reckless she is, tearin' through the country like that."

For some reason, Joan was reckless that day. She would have put Patsy over a ten-barred gate, if there were such a thing and it had lain in her path. As it was, Patsy took leaps he had never before been put at, lifted over them by a determined hand and a voice half stern, half coaxing. And at last the usually sure-footed thoroughbred stumbled from sheer weariness, and only Joan's long training in the saddle saved them both from a bad fall. Afterward, the girl had to lie still for a time in the shade of a tree while Patsy's heaving sides gradually quieted.

"Poor old boy, I did take it out of you, didn't I?" Joan whispered remorsefully, stroking the velvet nose which responded with a faint tremor instead of the hearty whinny his mistress's caresses usually brought. "Well, Pats, it was a question as to which of us did the running—somebody had to. All these tangles of human relationships—I'm so tired of them. I'm going to lock Crossways' doors for a week, while I help Chris Rand build the workshop up on the hill. That ought to take the nonsense out of me. It will—it's got to!"

XVI

CHRISTOPHER RAND, in blue overalls, blue shirt open at the throat exposing a sinewy browned neck, was shingling the roof of Joan's small house up among the rocks. Also in overalls, in a white shirt also open at the throat, Joan, a few feet away, was helping. Really helping, for her carpenter had taught her how. She swung a sure hammer, and only at long intervals did a nail go wrong. She had a bruised thumb, to be sure, but it was nearly well now; the thumb nail was still black, but the bandage was off.

Bob Ramsey, below, stood looking up.

"Lay off the man's job, Joan. I want you," he shouted.

"Not on your life. I'm booked for the day up here. We mean to be through by night, don't we, Chris?"

"Better go along, Miss Joan. I don't mind working overtime to get through before dark."

"Want me to leave?" Joan asked the question under her breath.

"Of course not. But he does. And it's pretty hot to-day."

Joan looked down. "The boss says no. He's a slave-driver."

Rand glanced at her with an odd look. Then he grinned down at Bob Ramsey, who scowled back. Rand's teeth were flashingly white in the sunshine.

"Come, Joan—please." Bob's tone was exasperated.

"Sorry. It's nicer up here than anywhere on earth, at just this moment. I'm thrilled at finishing my own roof." Joan drove a nail as though she really felt a fierce joy in her own expertness. "Run along, Bobby, do. If you've written something I *must* hear, come back this evening. Can't consider it now."

"I won't come back, thanks very much." And he flung away down the hillside.

By five o'clock the shingling was finished. Joan and Rand came down the ladder and stood in the low doorway, looking off over the valley.

"It's a perfect spot—I'm going to get all sorts of comfort out of it. It's thanks to you, who've builded even better than I knew. The little old darling shack fits into the hillside as if it grew there. If I don't do good work here I can't anywhere. By the way—hold still, Chris, just as you are, will you? Lend me your pencil?"

She caught up a bit of clean board, seized the flat-sided workman's pencil he handed her, and began to draw, in sweeping strokes. Rand obediently stood still. His pose had been an unconscious one, but the lines

of it were appealing to the eye of the artist. He was leaning against the doorpost, his arm up and his hand behind his head. His ruggedly pleasing profile stood out against his own work.

"There! Thanks. I'll do that in colour some day—to get the blues and browns of you. Pretty nice, eh, if I did do it—and if it *is* you?"

"Don't think it is me," Rand objected, eyeing the effective figure on the board. "Too heroic. I don't look like that."

"Oh, don't you? All right. Then I don't look like a wild Indian, black and dirty."

"No, you don't. If I could draw, as you can——"

"You'd make a picture of me, an appealing creature, all pink and white?"

"I wouldn't. I like outdoor looks—health and pluck, and good spirits."

"Oh! What a sketch of me! I sound like an advertisement for somebody's breakfast food—health and pluck and good spirits, all due to eating 'Krisp Korn' every morning. Well," her tone changed—she held out a very grubby hand, "thank you loads for putting this workshop through in record time. And for not keeping a lot of workmen here, but doing so much of it yourself. I've had twice as much fun playing around up here with you as I could if other people had been cluttering up the place."

"I've enjoyed doing it, you know. It's a long time

since I've built anything that pleased me so much. I hope you'll let me come once in a while, now it's finished, and show you my plans for other places."

"Why, of course! I should miss it if you didn't."

He looked grave. Joan, sensitive to the workings of other people's minds, sure often that she could divine what she couldn't guess, suddenly decided that it was time to be off. Although, as she was aware, she possessed no such beauty as Margaret's, something about her seemed to prove immensely attractive to those who knew her. Probably it was temperament, she had been wont to reflect. Even though her mirror gave her back the duplication of a face full of its own charms, she had little idea of the enchantment of that face when it was lighted by her own resolute spirit. And even though, at the moment, she felt herself, as she had said, "black and dirty," she was conscious that Rand was looking at her as a man looks at something which pleases him very much.

She was suddenly weary. She had had enough, for the time, as she had confided to Patsy, of "these mixed-up human relationships." She wanted to go and get a hot bath and a cold shower, and curl up with a book on a couch, without having anybody within a mile. So she took leave of Rand with an air of friendly finality, and saw him stow his long box of tools in his little car, get in and drive off, herself saying no word to detain him further.

The bath, very hot, and the shower, very cold, began to restore her, and an hour's sleep finished her off. At six o'clock she dressed and went downstairs, looking very sleek and fine. No denims, tweeds, or linens fitted her mood now; she was clothed in a little orchid silk frock which might have walked out of Margaret's Parisian wardrobe. Her slippers were high-heeled, her stockings the thinnest of chiffon; her hair lay in gleaming waves close to her small head, as if she were just out of the hands of a coiffeur. Tomboy Joan Dare could look like a fashion plate when she chose, and for some reason she chose now, though she was quite alone.

As she descended the stairs, she flung out her arms to the waiting quiet spaces below with a gesture of embrace.

"How nice and still you look," she said to them. "Just mine again. We're going to have it all to ourselves now for a while. No people, no voices, no emotions, no curses—just peacefulness. You're a dear place, and I don't know why I clutter you up so much with people."

She beamed at Mrs. Hopper across the dinner table. It was a square table to-night, its detachable rounded ends set back against the walls at either side of the room. A small silver bowlful of pink roses between a pair of slim silver candlesticks with lighted white candles took the place of the more elaborate

decorations of the past days. Joan unfolded her gleaming white napkin with a smile of content.

"It's rather nice to be alone again, isn't it, Hoppy?" she urged.

"Well, Miss Joan—" Mrs. Hopper looked gratified. She was a pleasant picture, in her thin white dress with an old-fashioned cameo breastpin fastening its folds over her ample bosom. Her forehead was smooth as a girl's beneath her white hair—"it's not that I mind having the house as full as it's been lately when I know you like it. But I've been thinking even you might be a mite tired of having people always around. And the play and all—the house has seemed as if 'twas buzzing for a month."

"It has been buzzing. And the house itself is tired of it. It said to me as I came downstairs just now that it was enjoying being quiet again. Well, we'll make the most of it, since Crossways seems to lie on everybody's path. Oh, how delicious this cold consommé is! Are broilers coming, Hoppy?"

"Yes, Miss Joan, and Cook is that pleased with them she says they're the best she ever put on the grill."

"Great! I've the appetite of a labouring man tonight, after all those shingles. Will you mind if I'm very rude to you for a day or two, Dragon, after having been polite hostess so long?"

"Do you think you're always—so polite, Miss Joan?—if you'll excuse me?"

Joan's laugh was spontaneous. "I'll excuse anything to-night. No, I'm afraid I'm not, always. But even approximating it wearies me, after a while. And with Aunt Olivia gone—I love her, but she insists on my being decent when she's around—I can relax and yawn almost in your very nice face, Mrs. Hop dear, and you'll not be shocked."

"I'm only too glad to have you rest, Miss Joan."

So Joan rested even while she ate broiled chicken and drank iced tea, enjoyed one of Cook's crispest salads, and finished a delicious dinner with raspberries and cream. When she got up, she went out upon a side porch and stretched herself on a luxuriously comfortable swinging seat cushioned in green linen. She crossed her slim ankles, folded her bare tanned arms under her head, and lay looking with half-closed eyes out over the lawn and the reaches of the garden; then up the hillside toward the long, low rustic house which that day had been completed, and which she could just discern among the trees. The quiet was unbroken except by an occasional passing motor. All three dogs, released for an evening run, presently spied her out and came and lay down near her. Reaching out a caressing hand, she presently, and for the second time that day, dropped off to sleep.

XVII

WHEN she awoke it was dusk, and Blimp was licking her hand—anxiously, perhaps, since he wasn't accustomed to seeing his mistress indulge in any such protracted period of inactivity. She sat up and patted his head.

"I must have been tired, really, old boy," she informed him. "But I'm awake now. Want to come in with me?"

Blimp came, followed her as she strolled to the piano, and sat down beside her as she began softly playing. He didn't like music, but he adored Joan; he would bear it for her sake. Candles had been lighted here and there about the room; their warm rays touched the orchid silk and the waves of Joan's hair as her fingers wandered over the keys. Mrs. Hopper, hearing, looked in, smiling and content, then stole away again.

"It's fine to see her just by herself like that," she mused. "It'll do her good, after all the company. Miss Faulkner's beautiful to look at, and pleasant—and generous—but seems 'sif she isn't just the one for Miss Joan. And all those young gentlemen—I hope nobody comes for a week."

But even as she wished it, the front door opened and a slender figure came stealing in. Mrs. Hopper didn't see it, she had gone away to her room. The figure, shadowy in the candlelight, advanced from hall to living room, crossed it unnoted by Joan at the piano, and dropped upon the deep couch at the side of the fireplace. With head tilted back, legs crossed, eyes closed, Robert Ramsey half reclined, listening. If he could have forborne to light a cigarette, though he did it noiselessly, he might have been able to listen longer. But the smoke drifted across Joan's consciousness as she played, and her hands dropped from the keys. She turned quickly. She could see only the top of a head, but she knew to whom it belonged.

"Oh, Bob!"

"Well, you told me to come back."

"I suppose I did. Only, somehow—well, frankly, the house has been so full, I was enjoying——"

"Oh, Joan! What the devil—— All right, I'll go."

He was halfway across the room, his tone as angry as it had been in the afternoon when she had put him off. She called after him.

"Come back, Bobby. I won't be stingy. I've just been luxuriating in the stillness after the hubbub. Have you done another play?"

He would have rushed out, if he could have stood losing his chance. He turned back, his irritation to the fore.

"It would serve you right not to hear it—and it's the biggest thing I've ever done, I know that. Chinning eternally with that bore of a carpenter—you don't know I exist, these days."

She saw at once what was the matter. It was apt to be the matter, when he had been wild over some new idea. Bob could stand a good deal of alcoholic stimulation without showing it beyond a nervous vehemence of speech. But when he had gone beyond a certain line, he invariably became surly. Joan couldn't bear to see him like that. She came over to him swiftly.

"Sit down and read it to me. Of course I want to hear it."

It was all he was waiting for. He had the script out in an instant. She was hardly settled in her place at the other end of the couch before he began to read, in an excited tone which bore him along at top speed. She watched him as he read, noting uneasily how thin his cheek was, how deep the shadows under his eyes. He needed rest and sleep. But this thing he had done was unquestionably interesting—intense—startling. . . .

Suddenly she ceased to observe the reader, her attention wholly on his work, which he was so sure was "the biggest thing he had ever done." It was certainly that, in a way, if its power to grasp the listener was a measure of its worth. But as it proceeded Joan began to get an impression she didn't like. Her

distaste grew with every line, until, as the play rushed hotly to its climax, she felt herself withdrawing in every fibre from not only play but playwright.

The reading ceased, and Bob, who had jumped up and been striding up and down as he read, his face afire, his voice shaking, dropped upon the couch again as if exhausted.

"What do you think of that?" he cried triumphantly. "Haven't I done the biggest thing yet, as I promised you? Tell me that isn't life—red, raw life!"

Joan was slow to answer. When she did: "It's certainly red—and raw," she agreed, in a tone strange to Bob.

"*What!* What in thunder do you mean? Don't you like it? I thought you'd be mad about it, as I am. What's the matter with it? Don't tell me you aren't modern enough to appreciate it!"

She sat up—got up—walked away—came back, while Bob watched her. His eyes in their heavy shadows of fatigue blazed sombrely. But he waited, glooming, for her verdict. He knew his Joan. No use to coax or threaten her—he would get the truth about her judgment.

She paused before him. "Suppose we don't discuss it to-night, Bob. Go home and get some sleep—you need it dreadfully. Then come back in the morning and we'll talk it over."

"*No!* We'll talk it over to-night, right now. Some-

thing's gone wrong, I can see that. You don't like it. You've reverted to type—the type of your grandmother. You think I'm too outspoken—you, of all people, who admire outspokenness. . . . *Well?*"

It was impossible to be wise in one's handling of this young man when he was in this mood—and when he had been drinking as much as he obviously had. Joan's own temper flared. It was a flaring for which, long afterward, she continued bitterly to blame herself.

"If you want the absolute truth—I'm ashamed of you."

Apparently he couldn't believe his ears. He stood staring, while the angry color surged up in his hitherto pale face. Then he laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh, and Joan went on quickly:

"The thing's simply rotten, Bob. There's nothing else to say. I'm sorry."

"You're not sorry. You enjoy saying it. You smack your lips over it. See here—you never said that of anything I did before. How come? Rotten! You mean it lays life bare, as it should be laid. Why be so damned cautious?"

"Listen, Bob. You've been daring, audacious. You've laid life bare, as you call it, time and again. I've approved, for the most part. I've admired your art, always. But this—Bob, it's unspeakable. It's —vile. It isn't *you!*"

"Vile. Unspeakable. Rotten. Putrid, you'll say next. Good English usage that, across the water, by the way, for any little error. Well, why shouldn't it be? The under side of life, the real side, is all that—and more. And it's gone out of fashion to smear it over, cover it up. Better let the sun beat on it till it decomposes into dust again. Isn't that logic?"

"The under side of life isn't any more the real side than the upper. But suppose it is, for the sake of argument. What happens while it's decomposing, in plain view? It sets up a stench, breeds poison, disease, even death, to all hopes—and visions—and ideals."

"Stuff! You're getting absurdly oratorical! There aren't any such things as visions and ideals, Joan. Everything's cold, sordid fact—or plain dirt."

"Bob, you know better." But what was the use of arguing with him, when he was in this state? It was simply to inflame his already fierce contentiousness. She stopped short. "I'll not discuss it with you. Sometime, when you haven't been drinking——"

"I haven't been drinking."

But he couldn't hold to that, under the contemptuous accusation of her eyes. She walked away, leaving him staring after her. Then, at the threshold, something turned her back. She went to him, put her hands on his shoulders, and spoke with sudden gentleness. After all, he looked such a boy, and she felt

years older, although they were of almost the same age.

"Bobby, let me call Mrs. Hopper, and we'll give you a room for the night. Sleep late to-morrow, and when you're feeling better——"

"Not *much*. I never felt better in my life. And I'm going now—right now. I thought you were my friend, but it seems any little thing can put you off me. All right, I'll stay away. I'll go to hell—for all you care. You can have your carpenter, that dumb fool. . . . Maybe some day, when it's too late, you'll miss me."

He flung out of the room; she couldn't stop him. Outside she heard the loud buzz of the starter on the little car he drove, heard the roar of the motor, the clash of gears, the accelerating get-away, the diminishing clatter—silence. . . . Then something like a crash in the distance. . . . Her heart stood still for an instant, then she ran to the door.

XVIII

SHE saw headlights at a standstill, just at the curve of the road. There were no houses at that point, nor any for a quarter of a mile, for the road led through woodland. It was not the main travelled road, at the intersection of which Crossways stood, but a short cut to the village used mostly by those who lived in the vicinity.

As she ran out and down the road, Joan was sure something had happened to Bob, for he had not been gone long enough to get by that corner, even at his crazy pace. She saw another figure running ahead of her, and as it came into the glare of the headlights she made out her man-of-all-work, Jenkins. Then the whole scene became clear, and her heart stood still with fear.

Bob's little car was a wreck in the ditch. Another car stood aslant across the road, apparently undamaged, its headlights trained upon the wrecked car. It was a stout-looking coupé, heavy enough to withstand the shock of the collision which had been too much for the other's flimsy structure. Joan's first impression as she neared the spot was that nobody

concerned in the wreck was moving; then a kneeling figure became discernible.

"Comin'!" shouted Jenkins. The next minute he was stooping beside the man who was at the work of relief. Joan, rushing up, saw all there was to see.

Bob was there, but it was not he who was hurt, though he was dazedly wiping the blood from his cut face as he bent over the form prostrate upon the ground by the side of the road. There was a fourth man present, a man with his fingers on a pulse, his other hand grasping an arm. The face at which both were looking was ashen gray. Blood was oozing from the head above one ear.

"Bob!—Why, it's your father!"

Joan was on her knees beside the gray head, stroking it.

"Oh, my God, Joan—I've killed him!—My old dad!"

The other man spoke authoritatively: "Keep cool, lad." He looked up at Jenkins. "Put your hand around his arm, here, where mine is. Hold it tight while I get out my kit."

Jenkins obeyed directions, and the stranger went to his car and returned, dropping upon his knees again, ready for business. Only the men of one profession go equipped so fully for emergencies like this. Joan recognized the surgeon's outfit, the skill to use it.

"His head—ain't that the worst?" ventured Jenkins, as he gave the arm over to the doctor and watched him rapidly put on a tourniquet.

"It may be, but it's this artery that matters first. That's shut off now."

He prepared a tiny syringe, sent a shot into the arm.

Bob was groaning. "He's done for. Oh, God—I did it—damn my soul! Look at his face!"

"Keep cool, I tell you, young man. That's shock—we can't tell anything yet. Pull yourself together, we may need you."

He laid gauze upon the wound on the head, lightly bandaged it. He bound the injured arm to the body. Then he stood up.

"Now. Where's the nearest house?"

"Mine—just back there." Joan faced him, and for the first time the two saw each other, in the strong rays from the headlight. Joan's orchid silk had a great splotch of blood upon it, just over the breast. Bob, faint for an instant, and gasping, had dropped his head against her, and she had held him there. But her face was full of colour; she looked unafraid and ready to do what was told her.

Afterward, she knew that she had had an impression, as she looked into the stranger's face, which she could never have lost, even if she had never seen him again. He could be trusted, absolutely.

"He can't be moved any farther than we can help —to-night. We'll take him to your house. You can run ahead and get a bed ready, and plenty of hot water. Better take this young man with you—he's had just upset enough to make him useless. This man and I"—he glanced at Jenkins' stalwart figure—"can get the old man there in my car."

"I won't go—I can help"—Bob struggled to his feet and stood wavering—"I won't leave him."

"All right. That's better."

Joan ran down the road on feet with wings. Bob's father! She knew him, a sturdy old fellow, a master workman, keeping his market garden a model for the countryside. Bob spent one night out of a month—or out of six at the trim cottage where his father lived alone. The other nights he spent in haunts of his own. He had a small room in a dingy New York side street, which Joan had never seen, but which he had described to her as a hole in the wall where imps danced when the music played. She had threatened to look him up there, and he had warned her never to come near it. His father knew little of his life, these days.

At the house, Joan set Mrs. Hopper and a maid busy. Before the car with its burden reached it, the largest and airiest guest room was open, its bed made up with the covers turned smoothly back, hot water bottles filling in the kitchen ready to warm the body

chilled and weak with shock. And presentlyMalcolm Ramsey lay between the fine linen sheets, such as he had never known the touch of; the doctor had done all there was to do for the hour; and Bob knelt beside his father, crying convulsively, while Joan tried to stop him. The doctor again spoke sternly.

"See here—we'll have to send you off if you can't hang on to yourself. He's living—and he's a strong old chap—he may weather this. Lend him your strength, not your weakness."

Joan got Bob away into the hall.

"Joan—I can't find—my flask. Must have dropped out back there—in the road. Won't you give me a nip? I can't stand this without it—I'm so faint."

His face was white. She led him into an adjoining bedroom and made him lie down. She brought him something milky-looking in a glass and forced him to drink it.

"Bob—if you hadn't been drinking——"

"Oh, God—don't say that! I'll never touch another drop—if you'll just give me some now—to get through this awful night. This stuff's nothing to brace a man in my shape."

"Then I'll get the doctor to give you something. But how you can want another drop of it to-night, Bob . . ."

She went away—stern-faced, though her heart ached for him—back to the other room.

The doctor was gathering together the contents of his emergency bag and stowing them away with orderly precision. He turned to Joan. It had been easy enough for him to see that she was mistress here, and that the white-haired, pleasant-faced elder woman, though well-dressed and efficient, was only her housekeeper.

"You should call your own doctor, now. I've written out"—he put a prescription blank into her hand—"just what I've done and given him—your man will want to know. I'd stay to see him, but I've got to be off. You see, I've a ship to catch that sails in the early morning."

"Oh! Yes, of course you must go. . . ." Was everybody who seemed to be worth knowing, catching ships these days? . . . "Have you time to talk with me just a minute, Doctor, downstairs?"

"Surely." He went over to the bed, felt the pulse, lifted the eyelids once more, and nodded. "He's rallying from the shock," he assured her. "He may become conscious within an hour or two—or by morning. Nothing to do till he does, and till it's safe to move him to a hospital and get that head X-rayed. Your man will decide."

He took leave of Mrs. Hopper, who sat beside the bed. He followed Joan into the next room to see Bob, gave him something very disagreeable to drink, and told him to stay where he was. Then Joan took this

efficient stranger downstairs and into the room where, a few hours before, she had been playing softly at the piano, her heart light. It was heavy now.

"Aren't we even to know your name, when you've done so much for us?" she asked.

They looked at each other—Joan still with the red splash on the orchid silk, now dried and darkening over her breast; she had forgotten it entirely. The doctor's face appeared a little tired and worn; it was an interesting face, lighted by clear gray eyes which looked as though nothing escaped their observation. He was neither very young nor in the least old—rather he seemed ageless, the type which doesn't change rapidly with years. He might have been thirty—thirty-five—forty—it didn't seem to matter. Certainly, he had known experience.

"Of course. I'd forgotten to introduce myself. One doesn't bother about names in emergencies, does one? My name is Jackson Locke, and I live in New York. You never heard of me, but possibly you know of my father, Alexander Locke, and that he must have trained me to give sufficiently competent first aid?"

"Why, of course, everybody knows Dr. Alexander Locke! Oh, I wonder, if you're going away, if he wouldn't see Mr. Ramsey. We—I—the cost doesn't matter."

"I'm sure it doesn't. And I wish my father could see him. But we're sailing together in the morning.

Father's something or other in a surgical congress to be held in Paris, and he wants me along to take notes. I'm sorry, Miss Dare."

"You know me, then, Dr. Locke?"

"Your distinguished mother painted a portrait of my father for me, three years ago. You didn't happen to see it?"

"No. It must have been while I was away—I've been away so much, and she's been here so little."

"She caught the best likeness ever made of him. Or, rather, she somehow came nearest to seeing the thing in him which is his spirit and therefore his real self, and brought it out as no one else has done. I wouldn't take ten times its price for that piece of work."

"Oh, that's what my mother does," Joan agreed eagerly. "Some people are afraid of her, because she won't flatter."

"They well may be. She has the seeing eye, and she can't be bought."

"I'm so glad you realize that."

"I'm sorry I'm sailing in the morning," said Jackson Locke, with a grave smile.

"I'm sorry you are," agreed Joan simply. "I wish —you could have gone on with Mr. Ramsey's case."

"So do I—for more than one reason. But when I come back in October I'll hope to find him completely recovered. Meanwhile"—he pulled out a

card case and wrote an address upon his professional card—"won't you please send me word of him?"

"I will, thank you, Dr. Locke."

"Now I must go—I haven't left much margin. Tell young Ramsey to brace up, for his father's sake, and let the devil's own brew alone. Good-bye, Miss Dare. Some day, perhaps, my father and I may drive out to Crossways again. You see, we came several times for his sittings; he was immensely charmed with the place, and so was I. I find I still am."

He shook hands cordially, saying with a nod of the head toward the stairway: "While you're looking after the old man don't forget the young one. His is the case that matters most, you know." Then he was gone, and she was left with the business on her hands of seeing to the immediate necessity. She went to the telephone and called Dr. Henderson from the village—a busy, clever man who kept in constant touch with the New York hospitals and specialists. He agreed to come at once and to bring a nurse. It was after midnight, and the new day had begun.

XIX

WHEN Malcolm Ramsey came to himself, for a time—to be paradoxical—he came only part way. During the first hours of consciousness he was back in the years of his early married life, and his son Robert was a boy again. That son sat much of the time by his bedside, his anxious eyes, hollow with lack of sleep, studying the deeply lined face which was only just beginning to look somewhat like itself. Dr. Henderson had advised waiting for developments rather than risking the long jarring trip to a city hospital. At Joan's instance he had had an eminent consultant out from New York, who agreed with this course. Both were hoping that the injury to the head would resolve itself into a simple concussion, with no fracture of the skull. Thus far the symptoms pointed to that probability.

Meanwhile, however, Bob could find little rest. So long as the ghost of a chance remained that by his own carelessness he had taken his father's life—even that he had permanently impaired his activity—his remorse hardly let up its gnawing. Everything he had done on the evening of the accident had been done with an irresponsible brain. He had brought the

elder man along in his car to do an errand at a house some miles from Crossways, had kept him waiting outside Joan's home while he himself went in to stay as long as she would let him. Returning to the car, furious with Joan, he had then—at his father's insistence that it was now too late to do the errand and that he would walk back while Bob drove on into the city—ill-temperedly shouted that he'd take him home by the cross cut. He had driven off in a mad rush, without putting on his headlights. He had dashed recklessly around the curve in the road on its wrong side, not even seeing the growing rays upon the tree branches that would have told him another car was approaching. Malcolm Ramsey had cried to him a warning and had tried to get his own hands upon the wheel; nothing could stop the unhappy driver.

These facts had been proved to him by a laconic but relentless Jenkins, who liked the young man none too well. Jenkins didn't approve of his frequent visits to Crossways, though he was confident Miss Joan could manage him, even at his worst.

"My lights were on—you know they were, Jenkins," Bob had asserted miserably, as the two had viewed the wreck next morning. "I'm not such an utter fool as to drive without lights. I put 'em on automatically, without thinking about it. I couldn't fail to do it."

"They wasn't on, Mr. Ramsey. I was standin' in my

door when you started off. I yelled to you when you went by me, but your machinery was makin' such an everlastin' clatter you didn't hear me. Truth was—if you want the truth—an' I don't suppose you do—you was too lit up yourself to know your lights wasn't."

"The hell I was——"

"Yes, the hell you was—that's exactly it. And the old man was too busy noticin' you and your condition to think of the headlights."

"See here, Jenkins, I won't take this from you, you know."

"You've got to take it from somebody, Mr. Ramsey, and it might as well be me. The thing is, now, to get this here wreck to the junk heap. There ain't no salvage to it but the gas tank, as I can see."

"I may as well go with it," Bob muttered. His head was aching unbearably, he was frightened, he couldn't stand up to Jenkins and his inexorable statement of the case against Malcolm Ramsey's son. There seemed no place for either car or driver except that same junk heap.

But Joan, with Dr. Jackson Locke's curtly kind suggestion in her mind, took Bob in charge. By the time Malcolm Ramsey had begun to show improvement, though still dazed as to what had happened, his son was fairly fit to stay beside him, which was the only thing he wanted to do.

One evening, at the close of a hot August day, the elder Ramsey lay with closed eyes, apparently asleep. Bob sat beside him; Joan, by a window, was sketching. The nurse, off duty for the evening, had left the house. Suddenly, without opening his eyes, Malcolm Ramsey spoke.

"Bob?"

"Yes, Dad."

"I'd like it if you'd read something out loud to me."

"All right, Dad—what'll it be? The newspaper, or a magazine?"

"Not either of 'em. I'd like to hear something out of the Bible."

Joan didn't look at Bob, but she knew without looking that he was startled. The Bible! Avid devourer of literature, lover of poetry, workman with words, when had Robert Ramsey read a line out of that Book? As a matter of fact, when had she herself opened a Bible? There was a little old one among the books in her own room, a relic of her early days. There was a beautifully bound, unused copy in the library; no library was complete, of course, without one, if only as distinguished literature.

She heard Bob say something under his breath—she didn't know what.

"All right, Dad—if I can find one."

"It's right up there on the shelf, boy—where it

always is. Your mother keeps it there. It's got all the family records in it."

"All right, sir." Bob's questioning eyes met Joan's. As yet Malcolm Ramsey was often confused as to past and present time.

"I'll get one," Joan whispered, and slipped away. She came back with the large-type library copy, for twilight was rapidly advancing in the room. Bob accepted it, opened it helplessly and at random.

"Anything special you'd like to hear, Dad?"

"A Psalm, maybe—I like the Psalms—always did."

Bob fluttered the leaves. "Where the deuce are they?" he muttered to Joan.

"About the middle of the book."

He found the Psalms, glanced over a few pages, held out the book toward Joan. "For God's sake, you read it."

She shook her head. "He wants you."

Unwillingly, he turned over the pages, then stopped. His eye had fallen upon words which looked as though they might do. Other words, he had noted hastily, weren't appropriate to read to a sick man—words about wickedness, and enemies, and hatred. Nothing like that for his father, who was the salt of the earth, if any man was. But this would do, he thought. He began, in a voice which didn't sound much like his own:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

"Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment; who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain:

"Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot; who walketh upon the wings of the wind;

"Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire. . . ."

Why, the stately lines were sheer poetry! His trained literary sense apprehended that. For the moment he forgot to be embarrassed over his unwonted task.

His father's voice interrupted him, speaking dreamily: "Yes, that's pretty fine, I always thought. . . . Your mother liked that one. . . . Queer, too, she was such a delicate little thing. . . . She used to say the words thundered. But I liked the one just before. . . . Read that?"

So Bob began to read it—the great Psalm which has been the stay of hundreds of thousands in their hours of weakness and fear and sore regretting. He, too, with his mother's blood in him, was keenly sensitive to beauty in any form. But these words held more than beauty—power emanated from them, and pity, even peace.

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities—who healeth all thy diseases. . . . For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. . . . For he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust. . . . As for man, his days are as grass——"

A queer little sound from the bed interrupted the reader. He jumped up, bent over——

"Joan!"

She was there, beside him.

Something gone wrong—perhaps a clot of blood, an internal injury thus far hidden. When he came, Dr. Henderson didn't know—he said nobody could have foreseen it. All Bob knew was that it was his own worst enemy which had done this thing, and that he was quite alone in the world.

XX

IT WAS a month afterward that he came to Joan with the first work he had been able to accomplish in those hard days.

"You'll think it's queer," he said, "that I could want to even try a thing like this. But when you remember that poets who were prodigals and artists who were rakes have written and painted some of the most wonderful things the world possesses, with Christ for a subject, maybe you won't wonder so much. I thought—maybe he—my dad—would like it. Anyhow, I couldn't get away from it—I seemed to have to write it."

She was very gentle with him, as she had been ever since he had suffered his great loss, with its heavy additional burden of remorse. If it hadn't been for her, he could never have kept his balance at all, he knew. He wasn't drinking, these days. It wasn't a sure case of reform, Joan thought. He might be quite as weak again, when the first loathing of his situation had grown less poignant. But for the present, the vivid memory of the unlighted headlights, the dash around the curve on its wrong side, the blood on the

old gray head, were enough to stay his hand. He couldn't lift the dented silver flask to his own lips —it simply wouldn't be lifted.

He read aloud to Joan the thing he had done. It was a bit of verse, in unrhymed rhythms, which he had called *The Other Thief*. The scene was the crucifixion of the Christ between the two thieves. One of them had begged for mercy, the other had railed. Their dying Lord had said that the one should be with Him in Paradise. Of the other—and to him—he had said nothing. Bob's imagination had been busy with the other thief, and with his fate he had tried to deal. The dealing was based upon the words he had read aloud to his father—"He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." He had pictured the Christ, entering Paradise with the one thief forgiven at the last breath, and pausing on the threshold of the door to look across at the other, left far away outside. Bob had thought—it must be—that the other would be given another chance. Anyhow, the simple, heart-stirring words he had written of the scene were such as his listener could not have conceived as coming from the mind of Robert Ramsey, on such a theme. They might, or they might not, be sound theology, from the point of view of those who studied these matters. They were undeniably exquisite and touching verse, and the tears which she could not keep back were her tribute.

Bob looked up. His own eyes were dry, but his lips were unsteady.

"I don't know," he said, "what's happened to me. Maybe I'm maudlin, but if I am it's not for the old reason. He—my dad—made his own work so good—so honest. . . . He was so sure I'd come through my wild days and prove myself sound in wind and limb—like his horses that drew his big loads to market. Somehow I—oh, I don't know, Joan, but . . ."

He pulled out of his pocket some pages of typescript, mussed and torn. He held them out to her.

"It's the stuff I thought was so marvellous that night—*that night*—and that you said was rotten. I've read it again, since Dad——"

He had to put his head down and try again. But presently he managed it. Joan had moved close to him on the couch and had slipped her hand into his—that helped him to get hold of his self-control.

"It *is* rotten. Of course, I was tight when I wrote it. I've mostly been tight—or on the way to it—when I've written anything that seemed to get over the jumps. But I must have been further gone than usual when I did that. I don't know how I dared read it to you—of course I wouldn't when my brain wasn't off the level. It's worse than rotten—it's false. Whatever I've written these last years I've prided myself was true, no matter how it uncovered the worst of life. But this, well, it just stinks for the sake of

stinking, if you'll forgive the brutality of putting it that way for your ears. And I'm ashamed of it. And I've had to go through hell to find it out. . . . With all my pride of being modern and magnificent, I'm not a workman worthy to be named in the same breath—with my old dad. . . ."

The hot tears came then, and he shed them in Joan's pitying arms. That they were tears which might help to wash away bitterness and bring health of mind and spirit, she was sure.

Afterwards Bob wanted her to go with him to the top of her hill, beyond the orchard. It was a place where one got a distant view, and they had often walked there together. On the way, he turned aside and went into Jenkins's tool shop.

"Lend me a spade, please, Jenkins?"

Jenkins looked up from a bench where he was putting a new handle on an ax. He had noted for some time now that young Ramsey seemed less excitable, more rational, than he had known him. He liked him somewhat better, though none too well yet. People had to prove themselves before Jenkins gave to them his austere approval.

"Help yourself, Mr. Ramsey."

"I'll bring it back. You don't expect that, eh? But I will."

"All right."

Neither of them had forgotten the plain words

Jenkins had spoken on the morning when they had viewed the wrecked car together. The memory lay between them and made both self-conscious.

Spade over his shoulder, Bob rejoined Joan, and they went on up to the hill top. There Bob went to work with his spade, while Joan looked on. Somehow she knew, because she knew him so well, what he meant to do. It would be like him, dramatic in every instinct as he was, even when he was most sincere. Why blame him for that, since it was his way of expressing a shame which another might think should never be uncovered to any eyes?

The deep hole dug—and it was as deep as his always short patience and his none-too-great physical strength would permit—he took out the frayed manuscript of the play. He tore it in two, tore it into strips, into small pieces, tiny bits. Then he dropped the bits into the hole, took up the spade and threw the earth in upon them until the hole was full. He made the earth flat again and laid back the pieces of sod which he had cast aside, trampling them down until they nearly covered the evidence of their upheaval.

Joan had stood by, watching, seeing that the act gave him comfort, and saying no word. Bob stood up, his forehead covered with beads of moisture. He looked at her. Her face was very sober.

"You think that's just acting?" he asked, sharply.

"If it is, it's acting I approve of with all my heart, Bob dear," she said.

"It *isn't* just acting. It's something I hope—Dad—sees. That's why I wanted to do it, out here in the open—and as high up toward the sky as I could get."

"Yes—I see."

He flung himself down on the grass at her feet, and put his arms about her knees, with his cheek against her hand. Then he looked up, with the face of a broken-hearted boy.

"Oh, believe in me, Joan—as he did, in spite of everything. Won't you? I haven't got anybody else to do it. And I mean it—I mean it with all I've got!"

She told him she believed in him, because she couldn't deny him that. She even could believe that his most irresponsible days were over, that this deep gash in his young life's structure might be the mark of a surgery which would be for the making of a healthier man. Anyhow, she was his friend more fully than heretofore, because he needed her friendship so much.

They sat for a long time on the hill and saw the twilight deepen and the stars come out. Bob, with his head thrown back, looked up and up into the marvellous spaces—and saw a little farther than he had ever seen before, because the eyes of his spirit and his imagination were a little farther open.

As for Joan, as she, too, studied the starlit sky and

its vast expanse, she knew this for the sort of hour which comes all too seldom to any of us, when the veil seems lifted between our little, finite natures and the great unknown. . . . In such an hour we can marvel at and adore that which we can't understand. . . . And so, for a little, lose the doubts and fears of every day.

XXI

JOAN was working away furiously in the new studio up on the rocks, late in a September day, when she heard steps rapidly ascending the winding path which led to her seclusion. She looked out. It was Christopher Rand. When he saw her he waved a letter, his tanned lean face full of eagerness.

"You look as though you have splendid news!"

"I have—or so it seems to me. May I tell you about it, or are you too busy?"

"Glad to be interrupted. I've been making a mess of what I'm trying to work out. Do sit down."

She had never seen him so stirred. He couldn't seem to sit down. Instead, he came over to view her work and stood looking at it critically.

"Doesn't look like a mess to me," was his comment.

"It is. It lacks imagination. I doubt if anybody would know what I'm driving at. To be frank—do you? Exactly *what* do I mean by it, do you think?"

He studied the dashing lines in silence. Then he looked at her.

"I think the idea is that it's not much use to try to seem what you are not."

Her face lighted. "If all the people who glance at such cartoons were as astute as you, I'd be surer this isn't too obscure.—All right, you've cheered me up. Do tell me your news."

"Now that I'm here to tell it, I think I'd rather take you to it. Would you be willing to jump into my car and go for a little drive? I'll have you back in an hour."

"Why, of course. I'm tremendously excited—and flattered. Let's go. I'll run down and get a hat."

She really was a little excited, as she slipped out of her painting smock and into street dress. If this matter of Christopher Rand's was so important, she would do him the honour of making herself look sleek and fine to go with him. He himself was looking particularly well dressed, as though the occasion were an unusual one. He had never before asked her to get into the somewhat weather-beaten closed car in which he went about the country. When she came down to join him, she was a trim Joan, most unlike the rumpled young person who up in the studio had been running her fingers through her hair in the effort to concentrate on her job.

"I suppose I'm being foolishly mysterious," Rand said, as they drove away. "When I came up your path, I really meant to tell you, and show you some photographs, and let it go at that. But something about seeing you made me want to do the thing

differently. It means so much to me, and I've been keeping it to myself so long, I feel as ready to explode as your friend Ramsey when he's done something new."

"Good for you!" Joan glanced at him in some wonder. "I never thought you could explode over anything, you're so self-contained. At least, I did think so till you played that part with me. But that was acting. This seems to be real."

"It is real. Though since I had this letter I almost think it can't be. I'm taking you now to persuade myself it is. If you see it as I see it, I'll know I haven't been in a dream."

It must be something he had built, she was sure. What else did Chris Rand do except build houses? Had he built one of which she knew nothing? In her own fast drives about the countryside, she usually took one of three or four favourite roads. When on horseback she kept to others less public. But now, after leaving the small village to which she was a daily visitor, Rand was taking her over a road entirely new to her.

"I didn't know this led anywhere in particular," she said, as the car turned into a narrow lane which began to ascend abruptly through rather dense woods.

"It does, to somewhere very particular." There was a certain inflection in his answer which told her that

he was unwontedly happy. She leaned forward, looking eagerly about her, as the car went more and more slowly up the increasing steepness of the grade.

"There must be a view up here. I can get glimpses through the trees. I didn't realize there was any hill so high on this side of the village."

"It's more or less of a surprise to everybody—very few know of the place at all. I've been keeping it rather a secret; or as much so as one can in the country. We've discouraged visitors, you see."

He nodded toward a sign they were passing: PRIVATE PROPERTY. NO TRESPASSING. "Until to-day there have been bars across the road right here."

The car ground on, had to be put into low gear for the last few rods of the ascent, then, with a hot radiator bubbling its protests, came out triumphantly upon a rocky plateau. Joan, staring delightedly across it at the distant view she had expected, didn't at first see that for which she had been brought. Then, as she jumped out of the car, her eye was caught by a building of some sort showing through a clump of trees. She ran around them, Rand following, and came to a standstill fifty feet away from what struck her as one of the most attractive houses she had ever seen anywhere. For a minute she stared in amazed silence, then she burst out with an ecstatic question:

"Christopher Rand! Did you do that?"

He laughed contentedly. "I hate to hear so much wonder in your voice. Any reason why I shouldn't have done it?"

"Of course you built it. Did you—design it—create it? Oh, of course you did! Why—it's a dream of beauty. I never—never—why, it's the loveliest little house—it isn't little, either, really. Big or little, it's simply perfect!"

He walked away for a minute, turning his blue-serge back on her, as though unwilling to have her see what might be in his face. When he returned she was walking slowly back and forth before the house, absorbed in it.

"Every line, every proportion," she murmured, breathlessly. "No, don't lead me round it yet. I want to take this all in, just as I saw it first."

He let her study it, understanding that she was appraising with the eye of the artist. When she finally began to walk around the house, he went beside her, in silence. At various points she stood still to look and look again. When, finally, they were at the front once more, she turned to Rand a face on which was written a curious sort of awe.

"I knew you were clever, unusual," she murmured. "I knew you built consistent, worthy houses—no other. But I didn't know you had it in you to dream out a perfect thing like this. You must have been studying—working. Of course I knew you'd done a

lot of that. But this—why, this shows you as a real architect, a creator of beauty."

A strong colour had crept over his uplifted face. He looked at her gravely. "You praise me too much," he said. "Of course, I've been studying for a good while, by myself. I don't know how much of this is actually original. It's derived from various sources—it had to be."

"I understand that. No architect, I suppose, but has to confess to getting his material from everywhere. Yours must have come almost wholly out of books, though I should have said, to look at this, you'd travelled a good deal. Nobody who hadn't seen the best could produce the best, to my way of thinking."

"I've been a good bit about my own part of the country. And I know a real architect or two—which of course I'm not. Do you happen to know the name of Warren Ellery?"

"Oh, of course I do. Do you know him?"

"This letter," said Rand, pulling it out of his pocket and looking down at it, "is from him. He's seen this house. It was purely by accident. But he liked it, and—wrote me about it."

"Oh, really? How splendid! Don't you mean to tell me what he says?"

"I'm aching to," admitted Rand, with a smile. He put the letter in her hand. It was a charming letter, congratulating Rand on having done a thing

so unmistakably of the first quality, so distinctive, and so beautiful, that he, Warren Ellery, couldn't forbear telling him how glad he was to know that it was the work of a man of no wide reputation—as yet.

It augured well for the oncoming generation of makers of dwellings, he said. As for the reputation, that would come; for the man who could do this could do other things equally worthy. And the letter concluded by inviting Rand to call at Ellery's office.

"Oh! Have you done it, or has this just come?"

"It came a fortnight ago. Yes, I went to see him the next day."

"Do tell me about it." She was watching him now with the keenest interest. Could this be Chris Rand, her "carpenter"?

"He'd asked me to bring in whatever else I'd done that had led up to this. So I went armed with a few drawings and blue prints. I—he . . . It was a nice visit."

"Please go on. A 'nice visit'! I know you're very modest, but I can feel that something's coming—if you ever get to it."

He was standing with folded arms, looking off toward the distant hills. His back was toward the house which he had built.

"He was kind and interested. A really big man always is, in smaller men who are struggling along far below him. That is—if he cares more about his

profession than his own name. I've heard before that Mr. Ellery is always looking to see what the younger men are doing, and is delighted when he can find any promise. I can believe that now. He offered me every help he could give me in the way of books and files of sketches of his own. He seemed particularly interested in my having worked and studied by myself, without any training in the architectural schools and offices. He—I can't tell you just what he said. But it seems he's had it in for a good many of the village and small city builders. He says they ruin whole communities by persuading people not to consult architects. They get them to choose designs out of those books got up by dealers in builders' supplies—mostly hideous collections. The designs are cheap and commonplace, with hardly a good thing between the covers. When I told him I'd refused to build those houses, he actually shouted for joy! Imagine how happy I was."

"I can imagine it." Joan's face was radiant. "What a strange thing—and lucky—that he saw this house. You say it was by accident? I'm interested to know what the accident was."

"It was a simple enough one. A client of his was looking for a building site, and he and Mr. Ellery were out on a trip together. Mr. Ellery was to plan the house. They were over on those hills across the valley, considering a site, and were looking over this

way. They guessed what the view must be from here, and drove over. From where they'd been, they couldn't see there was a house already here. They found their way up here, in spite of the 'Private Property' sign. The client isn't the sort of man who stops for signs like that if he happens to want to pass them."

"Were you here?'

"I'd left not ten minutes before. But the workmen were still here, doing a few last odds and ends, and they told them my name and address."

"And the rest followed. I see. But one thing I don't see. Do you mind my questions?"

"Nothing I wouldn't tell you about it that you want to know," promised Rand, with his deep-eyed gaze upon her.

"Did you build this house for a client?"

"Customer's the small-town word," he amended gravely. "You don't have clients till you get to be a city man and a sure-enough architect."

"Did you build the house for a client?" Joan's gay glance emphasized and insisted on the word.

"I didn't. I—built it for myself."

She looked at him amazedly. Then, with a smile, "I can see I'll have to stop questioning and wait for confidences. Of course, I can imagine what's going to happen next."

As she said it, she experienced a queer sensation of

regret. Christopher Rand married wasn't going to be as much fun to know as Christopher Rand unmarried. Absurd, since it was only Rand the builder of houses who interested her, not Rand the man himself. But a quick negative denied her inference, for the present, at least.

"No, you can't imagine. Please don't try. I got the land cheap from a man who owed me for building a house for him. I wanted to try out my plans and see how low I could keep the cost. I had my eye on a prize offered for small country houses. I thought I could sell this—if I wanted to. I don't want to. I—will you laugh at me if I tell you it's going to be a place where I think I can get away sometimes and work out ideas that I couldn't anywhere else?"

"Of course I don't think it's absurd. Shall you furnish it?"

"Just one room, for now. Don't you want to come in and tell me how to do that room? You haven't seen the inside yet at all."

"Why, I'm eager to see the inside. You haven't asked me."

He laughed. "Any other woman I know would have been in looking to see if there were enough closets and if the kitchen sink was in the right place, before she'd walked around the outside."

"Ah, but I'm not a practical person, I'm a dreamer, like yourself, Christopher Rand!"

"A dreamer!" He laughed as though the idea were preposterous. "I'm the most practical fellow on the face of the earth. If you could have seen me figuring on every stick of timber that went into this place, on the cost of getting it up here, the labour, the extras that always come along . . ."

She shook her head. "A dreamer—like Warren Ellery. And like everybody who makes something out of his head. If you can juggle figures also, you're in luck. Most of us can't—the capacity was left out of us when the Lord was writing the specifications. If we know colour values, we don't know money values. If you can keep dreams and debts separate, you ought to be able to do anything."

"Perhaps that comes from being a product of the soil rather than the schools. I'd thought it a liability, not an asset, but perhaps you look at it the right way. Come on in. The workmen have gone, but the chips haven't been swept up yet. You see I brought you here the minute I was rid of the men. And I had a foolish idea I'd like to sweep up the chips myself."

"I'll help you." She walked up the path, as yet in disorder, like all the ground about the house, with the litter of building. She didn't even see that. Already, in her mind, plantings of shrubbery were making the setting for this jewel, smooth turf stretched away from it to the edge of the hill, where the ground fell away abruptly under the ranks of trees to the

valley below. Even a garden arose, clear and colourful, to the eyes of her imagination.

Inside the house, she looked about her with the appreciation of one who understands. She went from room to room, her face glowing with pleasure.

"Oh, you—you builder!" she said. And said it as one who awards her highest praise.

"It's very simple, you see," Rand said, watching her. "I've always liked things that way."

"So does Warren Ellery—that's why he approves this so highly. But it's the simplicity of the best form we know. Restraint—even austerity—that's the way beauty comes, isn't it? Oh, this is sheer loveliness, yet there's no sentimentality about it. It isn't a stage house, it's one built for use."

"I should hope so. Mr. Ellery says he has no use for 'pretty houses,' and that expresses what I'd thought but didn't know how to say."

From a tour of the upper rooms they came back down the stairs to the living room, and here Rand began to sweep up the chips. The workmen's bench had stood here, the floor was deep with the shavings and short ends.

"I hope you've another broom—I'd love sweeping, too."

"Take this, and I'll do the picking up. We'll have a fire."

XXII

IN A few minutes the floor was clean, and Rand had carefully arranged a pile of the shavings, chips, and larger pieces of wood in the big stone fireplace. He brought two empty boxes from somewhere in the rear.

"We'll have the first fire," he said happily. "Sit down and we'll touch it off."

"Oh, but we ought to make a ceremony of it, somehow. If we only had candles——"

"How would torches do?"

"Splendid! Do make some."

He ran outside and came back with two long slender wands of dry pine. He handed one to Joan. She thought she had never seen his face so illumined, not even when he had been telling her first about his house.

"We'll have a processional," she decreed. "Come outside."

They went out to the front. Rand lighted the torches.

"Lead the way," she said, motioning toward the door.

"Not a bit of it. You lead."

"It's your house."

"You're my guest—and a lady besides."

"I'll not go in unless you lead. It's your house—you enter first with the torch. You touch off the fire. I'm just an altar boy."

He marched ahead, though evidently with reluctance. When they reached the fireplace he turned to her.

"One on one side, one on the other," she commanded. "We'll light it together."

The little ceremony suddenly took on an odd significance for Joan. Of course, she shouldn't be the one to share with him the lighting of the first fire upon this hearth; it should be the girl he was to marry. For, in spite of his denial, she was sure there must be somebody in the background, even though he wouldn't speak of her. She herself was taking this girl's place—it wasn't quite fair. But there was now no way out, since she herself had suggested it. At least she could make the occasion as far from personal as possible.

She lifted her torch high in the air. He lifted his. She looked at him, smiling—the smile of the gay comrade, not the sharer of his life's fortunes. The old often-quoted line of Charles Lamb came luckily to her lips, and she spoke it, with a wave of the torch, as one who offers a toast:

"'*A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game!*'"

They were new words to him, and they delighted him. He waved his own torch, smiling back. Together, one at either end, they touched off the dry chips, which burst into flames. These attacked the larger fuel as though they had been made for no other end than to spend themselves in christening this house. In an instant, a magnificent fire was roaring up the chimney.

They stood watching it together. It gathered force and all but thundered, and Joan said, with some apprehension: "I hope we won't set fire to the chimney, in our enthusiasm. Burning the house down would be a poor beginning to your hopes."

"We sure won't. The chimney was built for raging fires. They're the kind I like."

"So do I."

"I know you do. It was you who lighted some of mine before now. Did you know that?"

"I'd like to think so. By lending you certain books, you mean, that you might possibly not have come upon. You're a reader anyway, though. I've always known that by your speech."

"Have you? I'm proud of that if it's true. Yes, it was partly by lending me books. But much more by your own—by something about you—I can't tell you what it is; I don't know how to express it. I did try

to once—the night of the play. I know I didn't—I boggled it."

She was silent, though he had by no means boggled it. She knew she did have the gift, power—whatever it was—of inciting other people to do what was in them. How often had Bob Ramsey said it. She herself hardly knew what it was within her which seemed to have that subtle influence. Probably it was just her own eager interest in life, her actual excitement about it.

"One thing I know, Christopher Rand," she said presently, with the firelight making her eyes seem to show tiny sparks of flame in themselves as she stared into it, while he stood with his arm on the chimney piece watching those sparks. "Though you're essentially an architect now, and will certainly become one in due time, that's not the name I shall like best for you. To me you're 'The Builder.' Oh, I know so many men who are wreckers!"

"Do you?"

"Of course I do. Don't you?"

"Probably I think more about houses than men," he evaded; then came out in his own straightforward way: "Yes, I know plenty of wreckers . . . but builders, too. Warren Ellery, for one! Bothering to take notice of a fellow like me, he'd never even heard of!"

"Ah, he knows sound timber when he sees it.—How we're mixing our metaphors!—No, don't put

on any more wood. I must go home. It must be—why, it's almost dinner time!"

"I suppose it is—yours, anyway. . . . If you don't mind waiting five minutes more, I'd like to run up the ladder outside and take a look at the chimney, just to make myself sure of my own sureness. Then I'll bring some water and put out the last spark, for safety."

He left her sitting staring into the fire. What she saw there—the man who had brought her here forgotten—was a face very different from his. A delicately modelled face, handsome, distinguished, the hair slightly gray above the temples. Lane Fullerton was suddenly and distinctly before her, looking intently at her. And she was thinking of what this hour just past would have been if it had been he who had offered her the pine torch with which to light his fire!

She saw him in the room, walking about it, standing at the window to look off at the distant hill tops, coming back to sit down in a great comfortable chair opposite her. She heard his voice, its rich, cultivated tones, speaking of this and that—interests they held in common, other matters of which he knew so much more than she, and which he could make so exquisitely clear to her. She saw him get up again and go over to one of the bookshelves—oh, of course there were rows upon rows of books in this beautiful room—and take down one of the books, and stand reading a

paragraph aloud to her. She saw him turn to discover how she took it, how she liked it, whether her appreciation of it marched with his. And then—she saw him come back, to bend over her for an instant before he took his seat, just to show her again how he cared that she was here with him—his——

"All safe!"—The virile voice of the owner of this house shattered these poignant dreamings. She hadn't even heard his returning footsteps on the bare floors, but his words preceded him like a thrown missile. "Knew everything about the chimney was fireproof, but your suggestion started my imagination. I'm going to have the best fire extinguishers on the market up here—proving the practical side of my plans. But they're not here yet."

She turned to him a face so different in its expression from the one he had left, not five minutes before, that he stared at it, wondering. The light had gone from it—the smile she summoned was not the smile he had been watching this afternoon. She had been thinking of something else, of someone else; whatever it was it had taken her far away from Christopher Rand. She couldn't instantly come back. He saw that clearly.

He brought water in a pail and poured it on the remains of the fire, until it was drowned into blackness. Then they went away. The drive home was taken mostly in silence. Joan was not the sort of

person to turn moody when with a friend who deserved her best, but it was beyond her not to let Rand see that something had dimmed those bright lights she usually carried, so that for the hour they burned low.

If it was an anticlimax to his pleasure in her approval of his achievement, he gave her no sign of that.

"Here we are. I hope I haven't kept you away too long."

"No, indeed. Thank you so very much for taking me."

"Thank you for going. It was good of you to stop working to make the trip."

"Not a bit. I've loved it."

She had thought of asking him in for dinner with herself and Mrs. Hopper, as a little celebration in his honour. She forgot this plan until he had been gone five minutes from her door. Then she said to herself with a shrug, "Oh, well—probably he'll go and have it with her, whoever she is. I hope she deserves that house, though I'll wager she doesn't. Some village girl, of course—what does it matter?"

XXIII

EARLY on an October morning, just after Jenkins had brought in the mail from town, Joan opened a letter from Margaret Faulkner without a suspicion that it contained the charge of powder which was to blow up her life. Strong terms, but that was the way it seemed to her as she read the hurriedly written, wildly excited, and joyous lines:

JOAN DARLING, I hardly know how to tell you what has happened. You don't know—you couldn't have known—that the man I told you of when I first came to Crossways was Lane Fullerton. And when I came away from Crossways, just a few weeks ago, I had no idea in the world what was going to happen. I thought—he probably didn't really care after all, though we had had some wonderful hours together there. But he went away without giving me a sign. He has just come back now and told me—what I thought I should never hear from him. And oh, Joan—I can't write it!

We are going to be married next Saturday morning, very early, in the chantry of St. Thomas's, and sail at noon that day for France. Think of it, Joan—he came back just to tell me—and get me—and take me back with him! He says he couldn't get away from the thought of me, though he tried. He hadn't meant to marry again, he'd become so cynical as to there being any such thing as a really successful marriage. But he says now he doesn't care whether ours is successful or not, we've got to try it. Oh, I'm so willing to try it! I will—I will make it a success. I'll not tie him up, I'll not be jealous of that part of his life that I can't wholly share. I'll just be there, to keep him from the awful lone-

liness he's suffered from so long. I've suffered from the same thing—I *know!*

We both want you to be with us when we're married. We're asking only a few special friends. With Aunt Cecilia away, we can't have the usual sort of wedding—we don't want it, anyway, either of us. Lane wishes awfully your father and mother were here, and so do I, even though I know them so little. He says they—and you—are his dearest friends—the most like the "family" he hasn't got. I remember you told me the same thing, and that he'd been a sort of uncle to you.

Joan gasped, and swallowed hard. Had she really told such a lie as that? Undoubtedly she had, when she was trying to help the situation—the situation that hadn't needed any helping from her, after all!

The letter went exultingly on:

You're really my dearest friend, too. So I want you there, above anybody. We're not going to have any bridal party—the whole thing is to be done in the simplest way. Lane's writing Bob Ramsey, whom he's very fond of; and one or two of his special cronies. And I'm asking two or three people I can't ignore. In all there won't be more than ten or twelve to see us married. We're not even going to let anybody give a wedding breakfast, just motoring straight to the ship. Doesn't it seem odd, for me who have been so very conventional, to be getting married in this almost casual way? But Lane wants it so, and I really think it's ideal.

So meet us at the church, Joan dear, at half-past eight on Saturday morning, won't you? We'll leave you there, afterwards. I hope you and Bob will drink our healths at breakfast, in some charming place, when we've gone. We don't want anybody even to be at the pier to see us off. It's all Lane's planning, and therefore mine. I love it all.

Now I must rush off to shop—in such mad haste! Lane says I don't need a thing, that we'll go shopping in Paris together—fancy it! But I must have some stunningly conceived travelling clothes—and some delicious fripperies—you know. I'd ask you

to come in and help me, but I know you detest shopping for clothes. There's just one thing I ask of you, Joan—don't come to the wedding in riding clothes, will you?—Oh, forgive me—that was meant to be funny. It isn't—I'm too excited to know what I'm writing. I know you'll look adorable, whatever you wear! You've been such a wonderful friend—I can't thank you. If you hadn't seen my unhappiness and brought me home to Crossways that first night, all this might never have happened. It was seeing me again, there—and especially the night of the play—— Now isn't that absurd of him, when I was at my worst the night of the play—an absolute failure! Oh, well, God knows I'm thankful on my knees for whatever brought us together again.

Next Saturday morning, Joan! Till then—and always—I'm your

Devoted and gloriously happy
PEGGY.

P. S. Lane will write you too, of course. I told him he should write you first of all. He says he will, after he's sent a cable to your father and mother.

There is small use in attempting to analyse the workings of woman's mind. The next thing that happened—after Joan had sent off the gaily congratulatory note the occasion demanded, though she should die in the attempt to write it—was that she ran away from Crossways. Not to the studio on the rocks to rage up and down in a fury of disappointment; not to bed to shed hot tears into her pillow; not off on Patsy to tear up the dust. It was into New York that she went, driving her roadster, on the same warm, smoky, early October morning on which she had received the letter. Curiously enough—and it seemed curious to herself, too—a sort of fierce anger supported her. And the heart of that anger, trivial

though it undoubtedly was, was the remembrance of that supposedly amusing sentence of Margaret's for which she had so hurriedly apologized—"Don't come to the wedding in riding clothes, will you, Joan?"

The whole thing was right there! Fullerton was marrying the girl who didn't go about in riding clothes, or put on overalls and drive nails on roofs with village carpenters. The horseback rider might come in from these adventures to spend hours in the library with its crowded walls of books, its tables overflowing with the cream of magazines and reviews, domestic and foreign, whetting a mind which was already keen for the best and most stimulating other minds could furnish. But the undoubted fact was that Fullerton, whose own mind had seemed thoroughly to revel in the companionship of hers, could put aside such companionship for the sake of one who could look as Joan couldn't—like a vision of physical beauty. Well, so be it! And if Joan must—figuratively—dance at their wedding, she would do it looking like one who had never even handled either a riding crop or a hammer! The ambition may have been an unworthy one, it was certainly sustaining.

One couldn't be dressed exotically for a quiet wedding at half after eight in the morning, as at half after eight in the evening; nor even picturesquely, as one might at half after four in the afternoon. But, by the shades of all the clever tailors, furriers, and milli-

ners, glovemakers, shoemakers, and florists, one could look like a fashion-plate at any hour! It was with this end in view that Joan began a pilgrimage through certain specialty shops known to her that ended only with the ending of the day, and brought her back to Crossways so near to midnight that she found Mrs. Hopper standing anxiously in the doorway looking down the road.

"Poor Hoppy, did you worry? I'm sorry. Here, take these, will you, please? I didn't dare have them sent, out-of-town deliveries are so slow. They're clothes, Hoppy—clothes. And shoes, and so on. Did I happen to tell you before I went in this morning that Miss Faulkner and Mr. Fullerton are to be married Saturday morning at St. Thomas's in New York? So, since I didn't have a thing fit for such a noteworthy and very private affair, I had to dash into town and hunt some up. I'm really going to look quite well in them, I think."

She kept up her lively talk, choking off Mrs. Hopper's amazed comments, laughing her way through the minutes which it took to get the boxes and parcels all into the house and up to her room. Finally, standing ready to close her door with a last careless: "Thank you so much, Hoppy dear. I'm so bored with shopping—you know how I hate it—though it was exciting, too—I'm going to pop straight into my bath and to bed. Good-night."

"But, Miss Joan"—Mrs. Hopper couldn't find it possible to be dismissed with her anxious query unanswered—"you're not going to bed without something to eat? Some sandwiches—I could fix a salad if you'd rather—a cup of hot chocolate—you look so tired . . ." She was nearly incoherent.

"I'll wager I do. But I'm not hungry—I had a fearfully comprehensive dinner in town—a big dinner, Hoppy, really. Couldn't eat another mouthful before morning. If you want to send up a nice tray then . . . Oh, good-night, my dear—and stop worrying about me. All I want is hot water—and sleep. And in the morning I'll show you what I bought. You'll love it."

She closed the door, wishing she could shut out every thought which, in the rush of the day, she had been able to keep at least partially out of sight. But, quite as was to have been expected, the moment the door had closed she found that instead of shutting them out she could only shut those tormenting thoughts in, to spend the greater part of the long night with her.

XXIV

NEXT morning Robert Ramsey telephoned her from New York.

"Oh, I say, Joan—what do you think of the news? Great, eh? I've had a hunch the old boy was more interested in that quarter than he'd have anybody think. The night of the play—remember? Then, when he went off to Europe, I thought I'd been playing the wrong combination. Well, it's all right, isn't it? Aren't you frightfully flattered they want us in on their exclusive little affair Saturday morning?"

"Yes, it's nice of them, isn't it? I'm very excited about it. Never went to a wedding at that hour—think it will be most amusing."

"Listen, Joan. You'll go to breakfast with me somewhere afterwards, won't you? You know they aren't feeding us. Just letting us shake their hands and kiss their cheeks, and then hopping off by themselves for their ship."

"Yes, I know. Of course I shall want some breakfast, Bobby."

"That's the dope. We'll have a regular bridal breakfast of our own, eh? All right. S'pose you

wouldn't let me come out and drive in with you?—You're driving in, aren't you? Or are you coming in town the night before?"

"No, I'm driving in in the morning, but I'd rather meet you at the church. There won't be any trouble about parking a few minutes outside, at that hour."

"Right you are—only I wish I could have the trip in with you. It'll be corking, seeing the dawn come up—I don't often do it. We might get a piece out of it, with a wash drawing to go with it, all superb but subtle colour. What?"

"I'm sorry, Bobby, but I'd really rather come in alone. Afterwards, I'll love being with you."

"Just as you say, of course. I'm going out now to get myself some proper clothes—if I know what they are."

"Good for you. I had to, too. Perhaps we won't know each other when we meet."

"You'll know me by the gardenia in my coat. You never saw one there on me, did you? Maybe it had better be a daisy, in honour of the bride, eh? . . . Oh, see here—suppose I send you some orchids to wear?—I'll do it!"

"No, Bob, please not. Let the bride have the orchids."

"You mean you don't want me to afford 'em."

"I mean I don't want to wear them—thanking you

a lot. I'm going to hang up now, Bobby—I've heaps to do."

"Just a minute. Where would you like that breakfast? At one of the big places? Ritz?—Plaza?"

"Oh, no, my dear—of course not. Just a jolly, quiet little place, where——"

"Where we won't be misunderstood. I get you. All right—I know the place. Yes—I'll hang up—when you do."

"Good-bye—and thank you, Bob."

On Saturday morning, at twenty minutes past eight, Joan swung her roadster into place, locked it, and before getting out exchanged her driving gauntlets for a pair of fresh pale gray dress gloves. She walked slowly toward the great church, wondering if she were the first to arrive. Just as she reached it, Bob came rushing around the corner and approached her, his expression of interested approval of an unknown girl turning suddenly into a broad grin.

It was by the grin that she recognized him first.

"My word, Joan—I didn't know you! Great goodness, girl—you look like a million dollars!"

"That's precisely what I wanted to look like. Quiet dollars, I hope, Bobby? They don't shriek?"

"I should say not. They murmur—but it's a murmur that gets you. I never saw—why, I didn't know you could look like this!"

She laughed. "Your tributes aren't entirely flattering. And your own extreme elegance gives me rather a shock, too."

"Should think it might. I didn't know myself when they got through with me. Had to get the advice of all the Old Grads at the Club on what to wear at this hour. They differed widely, but what you see is the result of a tie vote. I settled the tie with my own opinion. I'm glad you're satisfied."

"You're superb—and very handsome."

He swept off his hat again; they were entering the door which had been opened for them by a waiting verger.

"Them words is welcome, but they aren't a patch on what I can say about you, when I get you alone after this thing is over."

They were the first arrivals, but they had barely looked about them, in the dim, candle-lighted chantry, when the other guests began, in quick succession, to come in. Joan knew several of these, Bob most of them—all men and women of Fullerton's personal world except two young women, of extreme smartness of dress, who were obviously of Margaret's. They had all barely greeted one another when the small bridal party itself appeared. An elderly cousin, a Mr. Stephen Faulkner, hurriedly summoned as the only relative within reasonable distance suitable to give the bride away, came in with Margaret. Lane

Fullerton, unaccompanied by best man or other accessory, followed. It was evidently to be, as Margaret had said, a ceremony reduced to its lowest terms.

"So dear of you to come," Margaret murmured in Joan's ear. The two looked at each other for a moment, and what their innermost feelings about each other were nobody could have guessed. Margaret was radiant, exquisite, faintly fragrant; her delicate lips were smiling, her eyes were pools of wonder. To Joan she seemed incredibly beautiful, as though her inner joy had somehow transfigured her. Even in the most correct of "going-away" garb she seemed somehow as bridal as though she stood in white satin and pearls, with a misty veil setting her apart. The corsage of orchids and lilies-of-the-valley she wore vibrated with her quick breathing; from head to foot she was Lane Fullerton's bride, ready for the supreme moment.

"You're wonderful, Peggy dear," Joan murmured back, and turned to Fullerton, who had come up to them, from other handshakings. She looked up at him, outwardly cool, smiling, poised, and thanked the Lord that she could do it with no chance of betrayal. Her first waking breath that morning had been almost a prayer that she might play up at this moment without a flaw in her technique.

She knew Margaret hadn't really seen her; that the

dewy gaze of her lovely eyes had noted nothing except that her friend was there. As to that friend's not being "in riding clothes," Joan doubted whether Peggy would even have discovered them if they had been worn.

But Fullerton's eyes, on his wedding morning, were not thus blind to all about them. Joan knew, at his first glance, by the way it dwelt on her, that he was regarding her with amazement. It was not that it was surprising to see her suitably and attractively clothed—she was no slouch, and she always looked fit and fine, whether in town or country. But it was a young person whom he didn't know who stood enchantingly regarding him here. Joan had her points—every one of them was brought out by her attire—they all confronted him together, as never before. One of the most sophisticatedly attractive young women he had ever seen—almost one of the most beautiful, in her dark, desirable way—was returning the pressure of his hand with a friendly grip, and her warm voice was saying: "It was so amazingly nice of you and Margaret to want me—it's such a joy to be here." If it was a big, bold lie, it was unquestionably a brave one, and convincing. Never had low-spoken words upon Joan's tongue sounded more sincere.

She didn't know just what he said in reply; afterward she had a feeling that he himself didn't know

exactly what he said. It was quite possible that he had said nothing at all.

The moment was over in a flash. Others were about them—the low murmurs increased. Then, after a brief delay, an altar boy entered from the vestry, the rector of the church in his vestments followed, and the party fell into place.

Joan and Bob stood side by side in one of the front pews, with two other guests. As the ceremony proceeded, suddenly she felt Bob's hand creep over hers. Somehow she was glad of the contact; it kept her from the fit of shivering which for the last two minutes she had been fearing would seize her. The sight of those two figures at the altar, so near her, was unnerving her. She couldn't yet believe it—believe that it was her friend Lane Fullerton who was thus receding from her world, as he most surely was. Never again the old companionship—he was Peggy Faulkner's now—in a moment she would be wearing his name! Incredible—and terribly true!

It was over—they turned—came back into the group who awaited them with soft laughter, kisses, felicitations, good wishes. Joan didn't know what she said to them, but did know that she had behaved with entire correctness and smiling ease. Margaret, glowing, rapt, held Joan in her arms for an instant and breathed her gratitude: "You did it all, you dear. We can never stop thanking you." Fullerton, bending

on Joan a look which she found it hard to meet—though she did meet it unflinchingly—said for her ear only: "It still holds, you know, Jonathan."

Ah, but she knew it didn't. And she was thankful when they were gone. With the rest she stood at the curb, watched Fullerton, a figure of distinction, put his bride, a vision of beauty in her priceless furs with the orchids on her breast, into her car; saw the two look out smiling; waved at them, smiling back. . . .

Then heard Bob's voice in her ear: "The damned thing's over. Let's get away quick. My right shoe pinches like the devil, and I'll bet your heart aches. They say women's always do, at weddings!"

XXV

FAR down-town, in an odd, dark wood-panelled, low-ceiled room, with burnt-orange silk curtains at the many-paned windows, an ancient refectory table set forth with old English breakfast ware, and a cheerful small blaze on the hearth, Bob took off Joan's coat. He whistled softly as he surveyed its accessories before hanging it up.

"Real chinchilla—my hat!" he observed. "And more of it on your inner clo'. Lord, Joan—you're a picture, if I ever saw one. Those dull blues and grays. . . . Who dressed you, I'd like to know? An artist, I'll say."

"I had an artist's advice," she admitted. "I hate so to be bothered with dressing myself, I decided to go to one of those people who study you and tell you what to wear. This is the result. I'm glad you like it."

"Like it!" He stood backed up against the fireplace, surveying her as she sat in a big chair. A waiter had said breakfast would be served in five minutes. Bob had bidden him hurry it up, and had slipped something into his willing hand. Then he had given his attention wholly to Joan.

"That sort of crushy blue blob on that darker blue

hat makes your eyes look like aquamarines," he continued. "I never *saw* such a convincing little hat."

"Convincing of what?"

"Of the beauty beneath it."

"Nonsense. I'm not beautiful and never will be."

"You're such a thundering good imitation, then, that I can't see the difference. Why, I'm crazy about you, Joan!"

"Crazy about these new things, you mean."

"Never. They're the frame of the picture, that's all."

But she couldn't keep it up. She turned away, looking into the fire. It wasn't necessary to maintain a false vivacity with him, she knew. He was quite as used to her moods and changes as she to his. He kept on looking at her, but lapsed into silence, until the waiter came back, bearing a trayful of fruit and finger bowls. Then he seated her and took his place opposite. A big copper basin filled with orange calendulas brightened the centre of the table between them. Enormous half-melons on ice, golden yellow inside their dark green skins, completed a colour scheme which even Joan's abstracted eyes had to notice. Sunlight was streaming through the burnt-orange curtains, setting the room ablaze with cheer.

"This is a jolly place—and a jolly beginning to a breakfast," she pleased him by saying. "Trust you to know where to go. This couldn't be nicer."

"Thanks. I thought you'd like it here. I hope you're as hungry as I am. This getting married before breakfast——"

"Yes—though I did have some coffee before I left home."

"You certainly needed it. You see——"

But then he was silent again. To tell the truth, in spite of his gay manner thus far, something seemed to have been gnawing him.

"Delicious melon, Bob—almost a whole breakfast in itself."

"Yes, isn't it?"

The melon was removed. The waiter poured amber coffee and offered surprisingly thick cream. Joan said, "No, thank you," to the cream, and rapidly drained a cupful clear, while Bob watched her. She accepted a second cup, into which she allowed the cream to be put. A smoking beefsteak in a green parsley border appeared, potatoes smothered in more cream, tiny hot rolls with crisp brown crusts. Honey—marmalade. The waiter hovered, offering everything solicitously. It was easy to gauge the size of Bob's tip.

"Why, Bobby, what a breakfast! Did you think we'd be so hungry?"

"I should say so—up since six. Besides——"

He turned impatiently to the waiter. "That'll be all for the present, Alex."

"Yes, sir." The waiter refilled the water glasses,

added more ice, fussed about with Bob's frowning eyes upon him, finally left the room.

"I'd have thrown him out in thirty seconds more," Bob growled. He leaned forward over the table. He was a little pale, and his sensitive lips quivered slightly. "Joan, let's make this an honest-to-goodness wedding breakfast. Let's go get a license and be married ourselves."

Startled, she glanced up at him from under the shadow of the blue hat with the crushy blue blob which made her eyes look like aquamarines. She tried to smile—a twisted smile which looked more like tears.

"Bob, you're a gallant friend. I suppose because I'm tired and don't talk you think I'm unhappy, and you want to cheer me up. Why should I be unhappy?"

"No. Yes—I know you're unhappy. Did you think I wouldn't know? Did you think I've been your friend—pal—as close to you as I've been for two years and not know when you've had a blow right over the heart? But I'm not asking you to marry me to cheer you up. I'm asking you because I want you. Good Lord, nobody could look at you this morning and not want you! Old Lane Fullerton himself—on his wedding morning—he—he *noticed* you, Joan."

She made a tremendous effort, and laughed. "All because of a blue hat!" She put up one hand and pulled it off—it was soft and it fitted closely, and

the pulling left the waves of her hair slightly ruffled. "Now! You see it's all milliner—and tailor—and the chinchilla fur. The real me is just as plain as ever."

His gaze grew concentrated, intense. He reached across and smoothed down the ruffled waves, his hand gentle and caressing. "I never knew what a lovely colour your hair is," he said shakily. "Exactly the brown of a chestnut in the sun. The hat—the hat—has nothing to do with it, dear—except that it makes your eyes look bluer. They're blue anyway, and those dark lashes fringe 'em like a hedge. They're a nice shape, too—just a little slanting, and when you narrow 'em—I vow they're fascinating!—Joan, will you marry me—*without your hat?*"

She pushed back her chair, her face turned away from him. She went somewhat blindly over to the narrow-paned window and stood staring out between the burnt-orange silk curtains at a blank wall which dropped down to an alley below. The sunlight which a quarter of an hour ago had been streaming in was leaving the window; it had come slantwise through a ten-foot space between two high roofs—its opportunity here was over, and it was moving on to other crannies, briefly to gild other nooks.

Bob followed, half his breakfast untouched—as was hers.

"Joan," he begged, with his slender fingers clutching her blue cloth sleeve, "I'm *not* asking you just

because—because I think you're unhappy. But I wanted you to know I understood."

"How *could* you understand?"

"I don't know. Sort of sixth sense, I guess. Writers get that, you know—they have to. You never gave yourself away, but—I've been jealous of him a long time, you see. And—you were such a damned good sport this morning, I knew I was right. You—I won't say you overplayed it a fraction—you didn't, to any eyes but mine. . . . But I knew you couldn't be as gorgeously gay as that without a reason for wanting to seem so. It was why—well—it was why you took the trouble to make yourself look so absolutely stunning. If you hadn't cared a whoop, you'd have gone in the perfectly good clothes you always wear."

She turned around at that, to gaze wretchedly into his burning eyes. "Bob, you're uncanny!" she moaned. "I never knew a man—why, I'm *afraid* of you!"

"You needn't be. But, Joan—you need somebody who does understand you like that. *He* wouldn't have—he couldn't. He's—Joan, you won't like it—you don't think it—but he's blamed selfish. I know the type. You needn't laugh. I know I'm young, but by the Lord I've been studying—watching—analysing my fellow man—and woman—ever since I climbed out of the cradle, I think. I like Lane Fuller-

ton—admire him—you know that. But he wouldn't have made you happy. He won't make *her* happy. I swear I felt sorry for her, this morning—looking as if she'd died and gone to Paradise with him, and just couldn't see back into this world she'd left. I give them two years before they're in the divorce courts. But you and I—*we'll* never get there, I promise you."

"Bob—stop! You're crazy. And I understand you, too. You're so sorry for me you're reckless. We—we'll calm down now and go home. You go and write a piece about it—the wedding. And I'll do a sketch. That old Cousin Stephen who gave the bride away—wasn't he every inch the temporary head of the family? The swell of his waistcoat, the tilt of his bald head, the fit of his spats—why, Bob, those spats were masterpieces of fit—they might have grown on him! He——"

Bob was silent. Palely he put the costly coat with its fur borders upon her, handed her the gloves she dropped, got into his own coat. The waiter put in his head at the door, noted with waiterly absence of surprise the deserted table still bearing food enough for several people, and inquired, "Nothing more, sir?"

"Nothing, thanks, Alex. It was all very nice. We're—in a hurry."

His gloved hand fished out an extra tip.

"Thank you, sir. I'm glad you were pleased, sir."

The two went out to the waiting car. Bob took his place beside Joan, pulling his new and beautiful gray felt hat so far down over his eyes that its shape would have been ruined if it had been of a less expensive quality. He lit a cigarette. The car rushed away, got stopped at the first corner by the cross traffic.

"Joan, dear—are we going after that licence?"

She turned around and met his eyes. She smiled.

"Bob, dear—you're a most wonderful sport!—I —I love you."

He turned a shade paler. "Then——"

"But I wouldn't marry you, beloved, if I knew I'd die a saffron-coloured spinster in the poorhouse. I wouldn't do you that injustice. Hush!—Yes, I know you mean it—you'd go through with it. Luckily, you don't have to. I'd rather keep your friendship and go on working with you than have you for a husband. Don't say another word. . . . I'm going to let you out at the corner of Twenty-first. Meanwhile——"

She glanced about her. The signals would change in ten seconds more. They were hemmed in by trucks, the drivers yawning or chaffing. In the midst of the busiest city on earth they were quite alone. The hood of the roadster was deep. She lifted her face to his.

He gave her the sort of kiss which means the closest sort of bond—with reservations. Then, just as the

trucks before them began to move forward, he crushed her gloved right hand on the steering wheel under his own, slid out of the car, and disappeared between the crowded ranks of noisy motors getting into their gears.

XXVI

I CAN'T *get* it, Blimp!"

Blimp's tail pounded sympathetically on the floor of Joan's studio on the hillside. His pointed ears gave her the closest attention. His very bright eyes regarded her fixedly.

"I'm such a dumb thing just now, Blimp. There's no point to anything I do! . . . There!—and serves it right!"

Joan tore the wash drawing into two pieces—there was viciousness in the rip and slash of the sound. She thrust it into a big waste basket which yawned open, ready for such contributions. Just now it was half full with them. Blimp came forward and offered his condolences by nosing his sleek head under her arm and into her lap and offering warmly to lick her face.

"No, Beautiful—I don't want to be licked. Come and sit on the doorstep with me. We'll idle awhile, eh?—since work isn't in us."

They sat on the doorstep, Joan's arm about the dog's shoulders. Presently Blimp's ears twitched—he made a nervous movement, but he remained loyal.

The motion in the bushes might be a rabbit, though it wasn't probable. Anyhow, he'd like to investigate—what were dogs for? But Joan needed him, he would resist temptation—as long as he could. Suddenly his pointed ears turned toward the distant gateway below, in at which a long claret-coloured motor with its top down was rolling. Joan looked also. Blimp was now possessed to go—he felt it the greater duty—but Joan's hand in his collar restrained him.

"You scare everybody to death, rushing at them, child. Wait and see. Who is it, anyway? I don't know that car—what a beauty!"

The smart motor came smoothly up to the side door, a slim figure in very short skirts jumped out, an urgent hand pounded with the knocker. Joan sat still, watching. She particularly didn't want to see anybody this morning, and this was a stranger. But Mrs. Hopper, answering the knock, was pointing up the path to the studio.

"Oh, Hoppy!" Joan murmured. "Why betray me like this? Shall I never be able to teach you?"

She let the visitor come halfway up the path before she rose to meet her. In her green smock, with her hair rumpled as it always was when her work wasn't going well, she stood up.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Dare?" called an eager voice. "Don't you remember me?—But then you haven't half as much reason to remember me as I

you—I shouldn't expect it." She was springing up the flight of shallow steps which made easier the last steep incline. "I'm Esther Ellery, and I met you the night of the Ramsey plays. I came out from New York with a lot of people. Oh, you were perfectly corking that night—I shall never forget it! You really were marvellous—everybody said so!"

They stood face to face on the doorstone. Esther Ellery was an extremely pretty girl, vivid, poised. She was wearing modish black, with a touch of leopard skin. This combination set off the Titian-red of her hair and a skin like an apple-blossom expertly enhanced. Her red-brown eyes were sparkling, her red lips smiled confidently.

"That's kind of you. Of course I remember you. You were dancing——"

"Oh, *yes!* Such fun—on that big barn floor, with the breezes blowing through. I thought I'd danced everywhere there was to dance, but I can't recall such a ripping place as that. . . . And one of the men I danced with was Christopher Rand. I was *so* interested in him because he'd just been playing that stunning part with you, and he still had on the costume. What a genius he is, isn't he?"

Well! Joan hadn't thought of Rand as exactly a genius, even though she had been amazed and delighted at the house on the hill. But very evidently this young woman was enthusiastic about him.

"Yes, he's very clever," Joan responded with the cordiality that seemed to be called for.

"I'm on my way to look at the house he's just built. My father's so very much interested in Mr. Rand, and he's told me about the house. He thinks it indicates a most unusual promise."

Joan's abstracted thoughts began to focus at last. The name of "Esther Ellery" hadn't meant anything to her until she realized that this must be Warren Ellery's daughter. Why, yes, indeed—and a socially prominent young person. Didn't she go in for interior decorating, too?—or something of that sort?

"The house certainly is well worth seeing," Joan said. "You know how to find it, I suppose?"

"Father tried to tell me, but I seem to have got all mixed up, the roads wind so up here. Is it this side of the village or the other, please?"

"The other side—about two miles beyond. The turn into the hill road is rather obscure—you'll have to look out for it."

"So Father said. Mr. Rand lives in the village, doesn't he? I wonder if I could find him—he might go up with me."

The eager red-brown eyes under the artful little black hat brim betrayed themselves. Esther Ellery was extremely keen about Christopher Rand himself—it wasn't all on account of the house. Joan remembered that on the night of the play she had been

reported as "crazy about him." Well, she looked it, this very minute.

"You might possibly find him in the village, though he's much more likely to be away somewhere, I'm afraid."

"Would you mind telling me how to find his office? Somebody there would know, of course."

Joan smiled, considering. Rand's "office," she supposed, was his own room in some village boarding house, or, more probably, at his shop. She really didn't know where he lived.

"I don't know—I'm ever so sorry. Anybody in the village could tell you, of course."

Esther Ellery regarded her as though she was something of a puzzle. Play intense rôles with a man like Christopher Rand, live only a mile or so away from him, and have no idea where he could be found? She stood knitting her charming brows. Suddenly she made a proposal, the audacity of which she herself fully recognized.

"Would you think me awfully impudent if I suggest that you come along with me and show me the house? I know you're busy—yet you seemed to be resting rather than working, as I came up. It's a glorious morning—wouldn't you care for the little drive?"

Joan stiffened inwardly, though her manner continued to be gracious. "I'm sorry—I'm afraid I can't

get away just now. But I can tell you quite well how to reach the house."

She proceeded to do this, simplifying and repeating her description until Miss Ellery nodded.

"I see. Thank you so very much. I'll run along and find it. You know—I wasn't just asking you to go with me as a matter of making it easy for me. After seeing you do those plays so magnificently, I was making an excuse to know you."

She smiled disarmingly, and Joan returned the smile. "That's very nice of you. If I weren't so busy —even though I seemed to be only idling as you came up——"

"Of course. And I'm taking a lot of your time. I'll run along this minute. No—don't bother to come down with me—I won't have it. Good-bye!"

She took herself off, literally running down the path, leaping into her car below by the house, waving back at Joan. The big, beautiful motor slipped away around the driveway almost noiselessly and was gone through the gate.

Joan went back to her work. . . . It went less well than ever. . . . It didn't go at all.

XXVII

AFTER a futile hour at it, she got up, impatience and distraction written on her face. She closed the studio and went down to the house. A ride on Patsy—that was the only thing when her brain refused to function. In ten minutes more she was into her riding clothes—and it may be noted that she was arrayed with decidedly more punctilious correctness than she cared to bother about when dashing off on one of her forays into the back country. Erect and a trifle self-conscious she cantered out at the gateway, in the direction of the village.

As she rode, she found herself noting the cars which passed her. Would Miss Ellery by this time have made her visit to the house on the hill top and be on her way back to New York? If the two met, would the visitor think it odd that a person so professedly busy at one hour should at the next be finding all the time in the world in which to go riding horseback? Oh, well, if Miss Ellery knew anything about artists and illustrators, she must know that their plans were always subject to sudden change. Inspiration failing them indoors, they must rush out

in search of it. Besides, Joan Dare didn't owe Esther Ellery an explanation of her methods or movements. . . . Of course, by taking another route, she might have avoided any chance of meeting her. But she wanted to go to the village, and that was quite all there was of that.

It befell somewhat as she might have anticipated —and possibly did anticipate. Miss Ellery had had exactly time enough to search out the house, inspect it thoroughly, and be returning. The long, claret-coloured motor and the black horse with its rider met just after Joan had passed through the village and was continuing on upon the main highway off which, two miles farther on, the hill road struck away. The motor now contained two people. It was passing Joan swiftly when its brakes were applied with perilous suddenness, and it came to a standstill a rod behind her. An imperious, laughing voice called after her:

"Please, Miss Dare—wait just a minute!"

Saying things to herself, Joan wheeled Patsy about. The car backed rapidly and paused beside the horse. Esther Ellery, with Christopher Rand sitting beside her—in workman's clothes and hatless, his deeply tanned face lighted with interest—faced Joan across the short space.

"I did find him, you see—such luck! He was putting some finishing touches on that perfectly adorable living room. We're tearing down to his office to get

something he wants to show me, and going straight back. I've got some of the most gorgeous ideas for that room. . . . Oh, I've a thought!—Don't you want to meet us there in twenty minutes? You're an artist—I'd so love to have your ideas about it, Miss Dare. I'm trying to be an interior decorator, you see. And I'm perfectly crazy about that room—the whole house, too, of course. But I know—I simply *know*—what should be done to that room, with the portrait Mr. Rand says he has to furnish the keynote!"

"If you *know*"—Joan was beginning, trying to smother an unexplainable irritation at this high-handed way of taking Rand's affairs in hand—a way which he himself didn't seem to be at all resenting—"you don't need me." Then she realized that Rand was making an urgent signal of acceptance to her behind Miss Ellery's back, as the latter leaned forward. Well, if *he* wanted her. . . . So she smiled at Miss Ellery, and when the ardent voice cried: "Oh, but we do! You've had so much more experience with colour than I. Please come!" she nodded, and answered. "All right, I'd love to." Which of course didn't mean that she'd love to at all, only that she saw no way out without behaving as though she minded this new turn of affairs. "I'll ride on and meet you there," she added, "when you come back."

The motor dashed on into the village, and Joan on Patsy climbed the hidden wooded road to the

heights. She had hardly reached them when the Ellery car came back; it proved that it carried a powerful engine under its shining hood by making nothing of the ascent which had put Rand's small car to its mettle.

Rand got out, carrying a big framed picture; he took it into the house and placed it on the chimney piece above the fireplace. Esther Ellery and Joan Dare, following, stood viewing it together.

"He was my great-uncle," he explained.

"Oh!—oh!" cried Esther, clapping her hands. "Oh, you lucky man! Isn't that simply stunning, Miss Dare? I said so when I saw it out of doors, but in here it's in the more favourable light."

"It's splendid," Joan agreed. She looked from the portrait of a ruddy, sturdy sea captain to the living figure of his nephew, as Rand, standing at one side, gazed at it as though he had never seen it before. Joan was struck by his attitude. His arms were folded, his feet planted rather wide apart, his head was up; he looked both judicial and commanding. It occurred to her that if uncle and nephew had ever met it would have been a question as to which took orders from the other. In spite of his workman's clothes, Rand somehow didn't look in the least like a workman—rather like some young executive temporarily helping things out in an emergency.

"I only knew I liked it," he explained. "I've

grown up with it; I thought I'd have to put it in this house. If it's as good as Miss Ellery thinks it is, it's worthy of hanging right there, where she says it's to go."

"Oh, *yes!* Those wonderful blues and greens—why, the furnishing must be built around them. The whole room must focus there, on the gorgeous old sea captain. Of course, I'm no connoisseur, but if that isn't done by a real portrait painter, then I don't know as much as Warren Ellery's daughter should about such things. Don't you think it's great?" she appealed again to Joan.

"I'm sure it is—superb."

"And the best of it is its being a real ancestor of Mr. Rand's. So many people have to lug distinguished looking portraits that don't belong to them into their rooms. This was great-uncle Cyrus, wasn't it, Mr. Rand?"

"Captain Cyrus Rand—yes. And that's his schooner, in the offing behind him. The old spyglass in his hands is somewhere in an old chest of his I've kept. He was a salt-and-tarry old fellow, to judge by some of the logs of the *Nancy-Ann*, his boat."

"He looks it. And his nephew Christopher has quite a look of him, I think." Esther Ellery gave Rand an audacious appraising glance of the red-brown eyes from under the artful black hat.

"I hope I haven't quite such a beak as that of his."

"No, yours has toned down in the two generations, and is merely aristocratic instead of autocratic, like his. Though I expect you could be autocratic enough."

The portrait was really delightful; Joan fully appreciated how much so. The old sea captain in his blue coat and white choker, with his strong, weather-beaten face, and with the blues and greens of his sea behind him, was an arresting subject. Esther Ellery was unquestionably right, the room should be made a setting for great-uncle Cyrus Rand. Just how far Christopher had intended to go in furnishing the room, Joan had no idea; she hadn't supposed he had meant to employ interior decorators from New York to plan the details and spend the necessary money. But Miss Ellery seemed to be sweeping the thing along, quite as though she had come on purpose—as perhaps she had. She continued to exclaim over the portrait, and Rand continued to listen. Why shouldn't he? It wasn't every day that he had such an important young New Yorker out to inspect his work or his possessions.

He turned to Joan, who had withdrawn to the doorway and whose eyes were still upon the likeness of Captain Cyrus, though her attitude suggested that she was about to take leave.

"Of course," he said, "I hadn't had any notion of 'doing' the room, as Miss Ellery calls it, in any special

way. I've got a few old things I think a lot of. There's a big chest of drawers, and a table, and a few chairs, that came from Cape Cod, where I was born. I thought I'd bring up those and an old desk I bought awhile ago because I liked it. But after that I guess I'd have come to a standstill."

"Oh, but you can't—you simply can't come to a standstill!" cried the impulsive little New Yorker, before Joan could speak. "With those things to begin with, all you have to do is to go on from there. Make a setting for them. You should paint every bit of this woodwork that delicious blue-green of the sea, for a background. Then do the walls in—probably a distemper of bisque. Yes, I'd say bisque. Then you should have hangings—well, I'd suggest an English glazed chintz, wouldn't you, Miss Dare? A black background—or perhaps bisque—and then a riot of colour, with the orange shades well to the fore. You should find an old couch, a deep one, and have a slip cover made, either of the chintz or of the same orange with cushions of the chintz. Oh, I'll send you out samples to-morrow—real samples, I mean, in three-yard lengths, so we can try them here."

She stopped, laughing, and looking a little shamefaced. "Oh, I'm too absurd," she said prettily—and the apology became her. "Running away with the whole thing like this! Father calls me his Incorrigible Infant, and I know I deserve it. Do forgive me. We

ask Miss Dare up here for her advice, and then I chatter like a magpie! It's my turned-up nose that does it, really. If I had a beautiful straight one, like Miss Dare's, I'd have more poise."

She was really lovable, in spite of her arrogant little way of assuming that she knew all about everything. Her "turned-up nose" was undoubtedly a pleasing feature of her pretty face; it turned up so slightly that it merely gave piquancy to her expression. She looked at Joan now, making a gesture of penitence. "Please say what *you* think," she begged. "Put me in my place, as Dad does. 'Just be quiet, infant,' he says, 'and give somebody else a chance to do some real thinking.'"

Joan herself was laughing now. She was not a capable amateur actress for nothing, and the moment was not one, she told herself firmly, in which to sulk. It was time to take the centre of the stage, and then make an effective exit, leaving the very footlights blinking.

"Very well," she said, "I'll put you in your place—although I think your ideas are admirable and deserve consideration. Isn't that the way your famous father would put it?"

"Exactly." Miss Ellery's hands were placed far down upon her hips, in that modern gesture of the modern girl; she stood in a spirited pose of waiting for the words of wisdom to fall from the consultant's

lips. Insouciant, captivating, confident—that was Esther Ellery. She might be little, she was also lambent; no room could be dark and dull which held her. Joan's artist eye appreciated her to the full.

"To me the old sea captain should be the focus of the room, just as you'd place him. And the old furniture Mr. Rand has seems just the thing for the place. I'm quite sure he has a lot of books in his desk bookcase. But after that—well, it's to be a man's room, and somehow I can't think of this particular owner in terms of decorations—chintzes, and sofa pillows, and so on. Blue and green parrots on an orange ground don't seem to belong to him. He's made these lovely windows to frame a far-reaching view—I don't think he'll want to shut out an inch of it with draperies. If he hasn't a big comfortable leather armchair, I'd suggest his acquring one and putting it in front of the fire. After that—it seems to me I'd leave it all to him, and let him build his own room around himself. So there"—she turned, smiling, to Rand, whose eyes were now intently upon her, then back to Miss Ellery, who also was studying her closely, with a touch of admiration in the red-brown eyes—"you have my ideas, which seem to be mostly '*Hands off!*'"

It was a look of gratitude he gave her, quite as she had expected. Probably Esther Ellery knew men pretty well; it was possible Joan Dare knew them

still better. A man with a sea captain like the one of the portrait for an ancestor wouldn't want to be smothered in superfluities. And it was unthinkable that Christopher Rand should be cajoled into making this splendid airy room into a place in which to serve afternoon tea to visiting ladies.

That Miss Ellery could play the game, too, she now cleverly proved. Perhaps she caught the look on Rand's face—the suggestion of relief. She struck her hands together applaudingly. "Oh, of course, you're quite right," she cried. "Father himself would say so, I know. He detests over-elaboration of any idea, no matter how good. It's just that colours enchant me so—I want to pour them over a room like this. Wouldn't you even bring in one big splash of blue—or green—or orange—to accentuate the gorgeousness of that portrait?"

"Next time you come," conceded Joan, "bring up some big splashes and let him see them, and choose whether and how he'd like them used. . . . And now"—she prepared to make her exit—"that we've talked all around Mr. Christopher Rand, while he still, in spite of our flutterings, manages to dominate the picture with a perfectly male solidity, I'm going to leave him to tell you what he really thinks. Good-bye—I'm so glad you made me come."

She nodded gaily at them both and ran out to Patsy. They followed, Esther Ellery to stand in the

doorway, and Rand coming after her to put her up. But before he could reach her she had swung into the saddle and had sent a slight prick of the spurs into the black flanks, which inspired Patsy to stage a spirited get-away.

Joan's riding hat was in her hand with her crop. A little scarlet fillet kept her hair from flying—she loved to wear it riding in the country. When she pulled off the stiff hat, the bright band always made a picture of her, as she knew. Somehow, at this moment, she wanted to make a picture of herself, for both pairs of watching eyes to remember. With Patsy's enthusiastic coöperation, she did it. The spirited caracole of the shining black horse, the lithe and perfect horsemanship of the rider, the sunshine on the gipsylike face with the touch of scarlet in the hair, the brilliant smile and cavalier wave of the gauntleted hand—then the dash out of sight around the curve which led to the abrupt descent of the road, and the thing was done. The living portrait outside the house outdid the painted one inside by a million miles.

As Patsy plunged down the road, her rider was saying to herself: "Of course, you're incorrigible yourself, Joan Dare! And I hope you're satisfied with being sufficiently spectacular. Moaning over one man in your heart, yet playing up your best tricks to keep one you don't care for from noticing another woman

too exclusively! What's the matter with you?—Now go home and go to work! Or—take the next ship and go to see the Morton Dares in Paris. . . . Yes, I'm mighty independent, but somehow, just at this minute . . . I'd like to put my absurd head in my mother's lap and hear my father call me 'Johnny.'"

XXVIII

"MRS. HOPPER?"

"Yes, Miss Joan?" Mrs. Hopper looked dismayed. What had she done—or failed to do—to cause Joan Dare to address her so formally?

"I'm going to take a ship and sail away—till Christmas."

"Oh! Why, Miss Joan, I thought you were going to be here a whole year."

"So I am, but that doesn't mean I shouldn't run away for a few weeks. My brain's gone stale—it's got to be refreshed."

"Your brain—Miss Joan——" Now Mrs. Hopper looked genuinely alarmed.

"Oh, I'm not on the verge of madness. Futility's my disease. Do you," she wanted to add, because her nerves were on edge, "happen to know the meaning of 'futility,' Mrs. Hopper? I suppose not." But she could never quite bring herself to hurt her good, devoted housekeeper with the weapons of self-indulgent irony. So she said: "Do you want to help me cure myself? Then please have Jenkins get up my smallest steamer trunk—the one with the *Navigazione Generale*

Italiana label on it—and make sure it's ready for service. I've an impression that a tray got wedged and needs putting in shape. You see, I'm sailing Saturday for South America."

As she packed the trunk, a few hours later, certain words whose origin she couldn't place and which had bobbed up from nowhere, beat an exasperating refrain in the brain she had described as troubled with futility:

> And 'tis a poor relief we gain
> To change the place, but keep the pain.

Nevertheless, she meant to change the place, since the pain had become for the present at least quite unbearable. Her first impulse had been to carry out that wistful wish of a few days before and go to see her father and mother at their own work. For a little, she considered this. Then she put the idea away. The Lane Fullertons were staying in Paris, practically settled there for the present, even though they were likely to do more or less travelling. If their headquarters were within a stone's throw of the Morton Dares, it went without saying that they'd be always dropping in. If Joan turned up in Paris, she'd be forced to meet them—and as yet that seemed to her unthinkable. It's difficult to conceal wounds—or the evidences of them; in spite of the pluckiest bearing, bandages and slings will show.

Therefore South America. She had been something of a traveller already, for one of her years. She had always meant to have a trip to South America sometime—there was colour there, she believed, in "great splashes"—to use Esther Ellery's phrase. She wanted colour, lots of it. Life had turned drab. She could have borne the drabness if she could have kept on working in spite of it. But not to be able to work meant for Joan that she couldn't play either. Only the ability to work could put one really in tune for play—that was her experience. Both required vigour of mind and body. She must go away somewhere and get them. Mere idling would be intolerable.

The trunk was packed, the passports secured, the tickets bought; the day before that set for the sailing arrived. She had telephoned Sherman, who wasn't much surprised.

"I told you you couldn't stick it in the country a whole year—or half a one," he had pointed out triumphantly.

"I've been at Crossways nearly eight months. And I'm coming back to it in a few weeks. I'm not leaving it because I'm tired of it. I just want to shake up a jaded brain and get some fresh ideas."

"Oh, well—that's all right. I'd like to run down to South America myself, if only for the voyage. Sorry I can't get out to say good-bye, but I'm leaving for Washington myself to-night. I'll tell Hugh—he'll

be delighted to see you off. By the way, did you know old Hugh's engaged to be married?"

"I certainly didn't."

"It's only just happened—he hasn't had time to tell anybody but me. The old boy's off his head—he's absolutely incompetent. I urge an immediate marriage, and get it over, and be some earthly use again in the office."

"Who is it?"

"I hardly know myself. Name's Dorothy Clifton. Father's a New York lawyer—one nobody ever heard of, but that doesn't matter to Hugh, who isn't on any pinnacle of fame himself. She's a nice child, by all I hear. He met her at some week-end party and fell like an airplane crashing. Funny, too. I've been under the impression for a long time that you were the only girl he'd ever really think of seriously."

"Of course that's nonsense. And I'm delighted to hear the news. Give him my congratulations, since I'm going too soon to have any word from him. Sorry not to see you before I go, my dear. Don't let Hugh bother to see me off—the *Vandyck* sails early. See you at Christmas, Sher. Good-bye and good luck!"

"Same to you. Take care of yourself, Sis. Drop me a line from all the interesting places. Golly!—these people who can dash off to the ends of the earth at a moment's notice!—Barbados—Montevideo—Rio de Janeiro—just the names of 'em fascinate me. But a poor bond broker has to stay on the job."

"I'd rather stay home and work—if I could."

She didn't say the last words aloud, but she thought them, as she hung up, after a final exchange of good-byes. Suddenly, she wished she could have seen her brother before she went. There was no reason in pitying herself for feeling so lonely, of course, when she was deliberately planning to make herself lonelier by going off on a solitary trip. . . . It was all right—she was glad she was going. It was quite the sensible thing to do.

The day dragged. In the late afternoon, she decided to go for a short horseback ride, to see if she couldn't knock this nonsensical depression into flinders. Why expect people to come to say good-bye when she hadn't let anyone know she was going? Not even Bob Ramsey, whom she hadn't seen since the morning of the wedding. Certainly not Christopher Rand, who wasn't an intimate friend anyway, and who probably wouldn't notice her absence before she should be at home again. Late that evening she would call up Aunt Olivia. She would send back brief notes to other friends from the ship—she hadn't so many —or so it seemed.

She put the spurs into Patsy. It was rather a madder dash than usual, which was why that which happened did happen. She struck off across country, putting her horse at various fences she had often taken before. Patsy was a good jumper, and Joan had

won red and blue ribbons with him at county meets. But he had his limitations, and he met one of them when his rider asked him to try a jump appreciably higher than he had ever tried before, with the take-off on soggy ground. He refused—refused the second time—and Joan, because she was in a reckless mood, brought him round the third time and somehow made him try it. He obeyed imperative voice and hand, his hoof caught, they went down together. Luckily for Joan, a farmer ploughing for winter wheat in a field near by saw the fall and came running. Patsy wasn't hurt. The ground was soft, and Joan was stunned only for a minute or two, but her right arm was broken and her shoulder badly bruised. Also, her plans for sailing in the morning were shattered. The lights were certainly down! For a little, on the slow journey back in the farmer's car, it seemed to Joan that they were quite out. But of course they weren't. What's a broken arm? Nothing to go to pieces over, and Joan didn't allow herself to go to pieces. After all, physical pain was easier to bear than mental, and the one shut out the other quite successfully for the following two nights and days.

At the end of that time, Dr. Henderson let her be brought downstairs, to lie on the big couch before the fire, where she wanted to be.

"I hate beds," she had told him. "Please don't

make me lie in one longer than I need to. Downstairs I can get through the hours twice as fast."

"Don't you want somebody coming in to see you, now you're down?" the village doctor urged. "I've kept quiet so far, since you insisted. Seems to me you'd be the better for a few callers."

Joan shook her head. "Please don't. They'll find it out soon enough. Just now I like to be by myself. I'm 'way behind in my reading—it's a lovely chance to get caught up."

Dr. Henderson glanced wistfully at the big table behind the couch, toward which she had made a gesture. It was covered, as always, with orderly piles of magazines and newspapers, some of them familiar to him, others temptingly strange. *Le Temps* —the London *Times*—the Edinburgh *Scotsman*— what wouldn't he give to have such riches on one of his tables, to say nothing of the time to explore them? Joan caught the look and understood.

"Won't you take along some of these?" she suggested. "I can't get through half of them, with one arm and a lazy brain. Please have anything you like."

The doctor's tired face brightened. "You'll smile," he said, "but all my life I've wanted to see what the London *Times* looked like. There's no reason why I couldn't have found out, but I've been too busy. I'd like to take this copy, thank you."

He went away with it, as well as with a pile of magazines Joan insisted on his choosing.

"Put them in your office, if you haven't time for them yourself. I suppose the usual back numbers cover your tables, for your waiting patients to finger over and wish you'd get some new ones."

He looked guilty. "I'm afraid that's true. If they see these, they may walk away with them and never bring them back."

"Then don't put them there. Keep them under your own hand."

He said he would. He went out to his waiting car, heavily splashed with mud—it had been raining ever since Joan's accident. As he got off, he met Christopher Rand, on his way past and into New York. In spite of Joan's prohibition, the doctor stopped Rand and told him what had happened. Something in his patient's face that morning had made this seem advisable. Two minutes later, Rand's hand was on the knocker.

XXIX

"WHAT a blamed shame!"

"It is, rather—from my point of view, anyway. How nice of you to come. How did you know? And won't you sit down?" Her smile was as gallant as ever.

Somehow, he looked to her more than usually interesting, as he drew up a chair and sat facing her. It might have been because, in spite of her insistence on seeing nobody, she had really been longing for the sight of some face besides those of Mrs. Hopper and the nurse. The latter had spent the first forty-eight hours at Crossways and had then been dismissed with eagerness by a patient who didn't want anybody around who wasn't absolutely necessary. Anyhow, Christopher Rand, sitting in the firelight, in what looked to Joan like a new, very well-tailored and becoming suit of gray homespun, made upon her a new and quite different impression from any he had made before. Whether her having seen him with Esther Ellery and having noted how that young woman seemed to be charmed with him had sharpened Joan's own appreciation of his undeniably good

points, or whether her present helpless and marooned state made his vigorous personality of itself seem more worthy of her consideration, the fact was that she was glad to see him there. The very atmosphere he had brought in with him, of mingled fresh air and tobacco smoke—that masculine aroma which even in these days seems peculiarly to belong to men—was reviving.

She lay back among her couch pillows—they were all of a dull blue silk—and was absurdly and inconsistently conscious of being thankful she had taken the pains to be attractively dressed for this coming downstairs. She wore a particularly subtle garment which, fresh from a Paris shop, had been one of her mother's gifts on a recent birthday: a wisp of flame colour over black and silver which had caught her fancy the moment she opened the box. Her bandaged arm was covered by a black silk sling. Altogether, if she had known she was to have a visitor, she could hardly have arranged a more effective combination of invalidism with art. That Christopher Rand took note of it, whether consciously or not, she could read in his face, as in any man's confronted with something arrestingly inviting to the eye.

"Dr. Henderson told me you'd been intending to sail for South America that next morning. What a blow it must have been to have to give it up!"

"I was disappointed. And of course I could take

the next ship and go along, only—it might be awkward with this"—she glanced at her arm—"and I don't want to take anybody along to wait on me."

"I don't see how it ever happened to a horsewoman like you."

"Oh, we all get it, sooner or later. Everybody who rides takes a fall now and then, if he ever tries to take a fence. But we go on taking them—it's an irresistible fascination. Besides—that afternoon I was for some reason wanting to jump something higher than I ever had before. Don't you know that mood?"

"I imagine I do. Is it ambition—or recklessness?"

"Usually a combination of the two. And Patsy refused. If a horse refuses, you know, you simply have to make him do it. Like a naughty child."

"Even if he knows better than you that it can't be done—that the fence is too high?"

"That particular fence—though it is rather a stiff one—has been jumped by the best hunters a thousand times, on cross-country runs. Patsy ought to be able to take it. The ground was soft and the take-off slippery—that was all."

"It seemed to be enough. I guess that was recklessness, not ambition."

She frowned. "I don't like overcautiousness. I didn't suppose you did."

He smiled. "Why should you think I do?"

"I don't think so. You're too virile."

"Thanks. But seeing you here with that arm in a sling, I can't help wishing you'd been a little more afraid of that jump."

"If I had—and a storm had come up on the way to South America, I might have been among the scared-to-death, instead of nobly inspiring others to courage. Of course, I should have wanted to do that, so my name might have been mentioned in the newspaper accounts!"

"You'd be absolutely game, wherever you were," he said.

"That's nice to hear, though it isn't true. The trip to South America itself was a cowardly sort of running away, and it's probably a good thing I couldn't take it. You see—to keep on talking about myself a minute longer—my work wasn't going well. I couldn't make it go at all. Everything I did was wooden. So, instead of grinding away at it even though I'd vowed I'd stay at Crossways one straight year, I ran—or meant to. I put it on the score of getting fresh material, but it wasn't that at all.—You see I seem to feel like confessing, even though it bores you."

"But it doesn't bore me. I wish you'd keep on, if you're willing to trust me."

The tone was so warm, so kind, that suddenly the most unexpected thing in the world happened. Joan herself couldn't have anticipated it. From the hour of her accident up to this very moment she had been

all she could have asked herself to be. She had set her teeth and hung on to her pluck and her nerves; she had amazed Dr. Henderson by her self-control. Since Christopher Rand had come into the room, her manner had been as gaily insouciant as though she were enjoying her broken arm and the bruised shoulder, which had by no means done aching. But she had really been more shaken and shocked by her fall than she had known, and now, all at once, she couldn't keep it up. She was unhappy, she wanted a friend, she longed for the touch of a hand on hers—a hand not Mrs. Hopper's nor that of a trained nurse. Therefore, the unwonted impulse to cry got the better of her, and before she knew it she had turned her head and was sobbing helplessly into the blue silk pillow. And instantly, as was to have been expected, Rand did what any man does in such circumstances —came to see what he could do about it. As she felt his hand on her hair, gently smoothing it, she accused herself of deliberately inviting his sympathy—and didn't care in the least if she had. She might be mourning for Lane Fullerton, but she wasn't beyond accepting the friendliness of Christopher Rand. Why not? As he stood there, his dark, characterful face solicitous as he bent over the couch, he looked like a strong tower to which any woman might be glad to run. And somehow, without seeing him, Joan knew exactly how he looked.

"Does the arm hurt so?—Or the shoulder?—Shall I call anybody?"

The head in the pillow was shaken violently.

"Something's gone wrong, I can see. I'm darned sorry. You may not want to tell me, but I wish you could. I'd like to try to help."

Having begun, she couldn't stop crying at once. But she put out her one free hand blindly toward him, and he took it in his. He reached around and pulled up his chair, and sat holding the firm little hand which seemed to cling to his as if for comfort. His gaze was fixed upon the pretty head pressed into the pillow; the shoulder, with the band of the sling passing over but not wholly concealing it under its film of flame colour, turned toward him by her attitude. She looked like something hurt and defenceless, and he would have been less than man if his tenderness hadn't been stirred. He held the hand very close in his, and again lightly touched the smooth head with its soft waves of chestnut hair like silk under his fingers. Always he had seen her full of life and spirit, laughing, her head up; or if in a defiant, argumentative mood, or even only in a thoughtful one, still vividly a fascinating person to be reckoned with. Now, for the first time, she seemed to have lost her usual sureness and independence, and to need very much whatever he could give her. Probably it was just the sense of someone standing by that she wanted. Who wouldn't?

Not even a beautiful home, silken pillows, and servants to come at one's call could take the place of one honest, stalwart friend. He had never thought of her as lonely; could she possibly be that?

"Don't cry any more," he urged presently with some anxiety, as one might a child. "I expect the fall upset you more than anybody realized—such things do. Or, if it's something else, you can be sure of this—whatever it is, it'll pass by. I suppose that's been said a great many times to people in trouble, but I've had a lot of experience with the truth of it. Things that seem pretty bad one day seem quite different the next. And we wonder how we could let them get us so. You wouldn't let this—whatever it is—get you, if you had both fists to fight it with. As it is, with one arm in a splint—how can you help it? But I don't want you to cry any more. Come—you're not going to!"

Well, what he was saying was commonplace enough—the sort of thing any man of average perspicacity might say to any woman, if she buried her head in a pillow and shook with sobs she couldn't seem to control. But the low and cheerfully understanding inflections of the voice in which he said it were by no means commonplace. Not Lane Fullerton, with all his command of unhackneyed and forceful English, not Robert Ramsey, with his quivering imagination and dramatic intuition, could more perfectly have con-

veyed to Joan Dare the sense of a sturdy friend coming as close as he could venture to think she might want him to come. For Christopher Rand, it occurred to her, through her crowding thoughts, it was coming extraordinarily close. Yet it was quite impossible to want him to stay further away.

She gained control of herself now in short order. She drew her hand away and felt for the extra handkerchief which Mrs. Hopper had provided, and which lay on the table beside her. It was put into her hand.

"I might have seen that sooner," said her companion, in a lighter tone. "Or given you mine. You don't need all three, do you?"

She shook her head. After a minute more, she showed him her flushed and tear-stained face, with a smile struggling to the surface.

"I'm dreadfully ashamed."

"You needn't be. I have an idea you don't cry very often."

"Not for a year, I'm sure. I seem to be just—shaky—to-day."

"I'm glad I happened to be here when you got shaky—if I didn't make you so."

"Oh, no! Will you please hand me that little vanity case—and will you mind if I put on some powder? Of course, I'm a fright."

"Will you let me watch you do it? I've often wondered how they make it stick."

"You shall see." Once having regained her hold upon her nerves, she recovered her poise rapidly. He looked on amused. while she repaired the ravages of the tears.

"Except that my eyes will be red for a while yet. You'd better go while the tears are stopped. You might say some other beautifully kind thing and set me off again."

"I'd say the kindest thing there is to say, if I knew how. After all you've done for me——"

"Oh, I don't want to think you're being so nice to me just out of gratitude for imaginary favours. You've done quite as much for me."

"I don't know what it could be. But I'm not being 'nice'—as you call it—out of gratitude for anything. I'd like to think I'm friend enough of yours so you could call on me for—anything in the world I could do for you."

"Do you want to think that?" She put out her hand again—the hand he had held until it had changed from icy chill to thorough warmth. "Then you may think it. I'd like you for a friend—a real one."

This time he seized her hand and gripped it till he hurt her, though she didn't mind. "May I come every day, while you're laid up this way?"

"Why, of course, if you want to bother—and aren't too busy."

"I'll make the time."

The firelight was almost the only light in the room by now, the November day had grown so late. But when one weeps one doesn't want high illumination—nor when one recovers from weeping, in spite of aid from vanity cases.

"Shall we have tea?" proposed Joan, quite irrelevantly—because irrelevance seemed the next thing in order, lest sentiment prevail.

"Tea? Brought in here, you mean, with little thin cups I'd be likely to break?"

"You'd never break a teacup. And Hoppy's little sandwiches and cakes are delicious."

"Thanks—you may have them. I don't like tea—and if you offered me sandwiches I'd eat the plateful and not know I'd had any. I've got to go, anyway. I'd no idea it was so late. I'm due for dinner with a man in New York."

He took his leave in a hurry, like most men when they discover that they've been beguiled into delaying a business or social engagement. As Joan saw him go she was wondering if it could possibly be Warren Ellery with whom he was to dine. It must be an informal dinner, wherever it was—probably at some hotel. Would Esther be there—Esther in an artful hat? How well did he know Esther by now, anyway?

But he hadn't held Esther's hand—he wasn't the sort of man who goes about holding hands. He hadn't

asked to come to see Esther every day. In spite of the fact that it was Lane Fullerton whose face was always before Joan's eyes, these days, she was glad that Christopher Rand was coming to-morrow—was coming every day. Just to have so genuine a friend look in upon her before each setting sun would mean all the difference between utter loneliness and a state that could be borne.

XXX

LE BRET

Stop trying to be Three Musketeers in one!
Fortune and glory—

CYRANO

What would you have me do?
Seek for the patronage of some great man,
And like a creeping vine on a tall tree
Crawl upward, where I cannot stand alone?
No thank you! Dedicate, as others do.
Poems to pawnbrokers? Be a buffoon
In the vile hope of teasing out a smile
On some cold face? No thank you!

Christopher Rand stopped reading to look up, exulting. "This man Cyrano! How I'd like to hear him saying it!"

"Why don't you? The play's having a revival in New York this very week. Do go and see it. It's the most gorgeous thing. Since you enjoy it so in the text, you'd go quite mad over the production. I did—last year—completely out of my head."

"Would you expect me to go quite mad over anything?" questioned Rand, with a quizzical look.

Joan considered him. "Why not? You're cool and quiet outside—that's explained when one knows you came from Cape Cod. But I've no doubt in the world

you can reach the boiling point. It's a great place to reach, you know."

"I've always heard that used of getting mad—in another sense. Angry—boiling over."

"A would-be young genius sent a poem to a great editor. He wrote back: 'The verses show promise, but your boiling point isn't quite high enough.'"

"I see. Well, this Frenchman who wrote *Cyrano de Bergerac* had certainly got up to his. I never read anything I liked so much."

"Hurray! I knew you would. And do please go to see it, and then come and tell me how you liked it."

"I will," promised Christopher Rand, with calculation in his eye. And went on with the reading, going back with relish to the beginning of the lines he had broken in upon from sheer enjoyment of their spirit. He and Joan were reading together Rostand's matchless play; they were well into the second act.

It was two weeks since Joan's accident, and Rand had kept his promise to the letter. There had been no day on which he had not, at one hour or another, come in to see her. On some days his visits had been brief; she could see that, as he had said he would, he had been obliged to "make the time." On other days he had lingered. Of late, he had taken to coming in during the evening.

The bruised shoulder had been the injury which had forced her to keep quiet; the broken arm was

mending normally, and she could go about with it. To-night the shoulder was feeling more like a proper shoulder; she had told him she was fairly comfortable at last and meant to go out on the morrow. But time dragged for her; it would be a considerable time before she could use her right hand for sketching or for any other real purpose. She had found herself looking forward with increasing pleasure to these visits.

They finished the second act. Rand read well, and the part of Cyrano, which Joan had insisted on his taking, delighted him so that he quite forgot himself, and was able to put into the lines a surprising amount of the gay swagger which the playwright had indicated.

He got up, slapping the closed book with an applauding hand. "I didn't know there was such a play in the world," he said. "What I owe to you for introducing me to all the great things you have!"

"It's such fun to see somebody else enjoy a thing up to the hilt that one's keen about one's self."

He went over to the piano, sat down upon the bench, and extended his brown hands over the keyboard. Her eyes followed him in some surprise. Was he going to play a tune? What next?

He touched a few chords, lightly; they were real chords. Then, accompanying himself in a somewhat sketchy manner, yet without disharmony and with an effect of support, he began to sing in the clear,

rich tenor which had surprised her when he had sung with Bob Ramsey's quartette in the play. The song he was dashing into was "Lord Jeffrey Amherst," that inimitable, rollicking college song, dear to many male quartettes.

When he finished and looked round at her, she was laughing, and her eyes were as merry as her voice.

"'And he looked around for more when he was through!'" she repeated. "Yes—another Cyrano de Bergerac, wasn't he?"

"I'll say he was. I'd like to see the pair of them brandishing their swords in each other's faces. Which do you bet on?"

"Cyrano, of course. Don't you?"

"Lord Jeffrey, being an Englishman, would give him a hard bout of it, but I expect the Frenchman would get that 'thrust home' to brag about. Jolly, what words!"

He picked up the book, found the place, and read the opening lines of the famous duel verses again.

Lightly I toss my hat away,
  Languidly over my arm let fall
The cloak that covers my bright array—
  Then out swords, and to work withal!

  A Launcelot in his Lady's hall . . .
A Spartacus, at the Hippodrome! . . .
  I dally a while with you, dear jackal,
Then, as I end the refrain, thrust home.

A voice from the doorway, high-pitched and slightly ironic, made reader and listener turn. Robert Ramsey stood looking in, his gaze fixed upon Joan.

"Well, well. Since you can't go to the play, the play comes to you, is it so? Congratulations! . . . When did Rand and Rostand meet? The old chap did a good job of carpentering, eh, Rand?—if you are any judge—and you ought to be."

Joan was instantly furious. The tone was laughing, not really insolent, but taken with the words the effect wasn't exactly pleasant. Bob was looking particularly elegant; his dinner coat proclaimed that he was either on his way to some place of festivity, or was making an occasion of his call on Joan. His appearance somehow gave more point and sting to his words. She knew what was the matter—it was his old jealousy of any man whom she might seem to favour as much as himself. He had come out to see her twice since the accident, but this was the first time he had met Rand here. She saw the other man look at him curiously, as thought he couldn't quite believe Ramsey meant to be disagreeable; then Rand's expression slightly hardened. For some reason, although the two hadn't met in many weeks, and Christopher at sight of him had taken an instinctive step toward him, Bob didn't advance to shake hands. A nearly imperceptible nod had been his sole greeting—except the carelessly flung words which had been better left unsaid.

The result of this interruption was that Rand took himself off within the next five minutes, although Joan did her best to keep him and to make the two men see each other as she saw them both. Rand's manner was perfect, as Joan noted with admiration. He showed no sense of affront; but he neither replied to Bob's opening raillery, nor did he directly address him. When he took leave of Joan, he merely included Bob in his gesture of farewell as he left the room. Then he was gone, and Joan, making sure that he had quitted the house, turned to Bob with accusingly sparkling eyes.

"Bob! How could you! Such an ill-natured greeting! Why should you keep slings and arrows to let fly at Christopher Rand? Even if he were only the unread workman you so rudely insist on implying, he could still be the gentleman he is."

Bob threw himself upon the couch beside her, leaning his head back, and taking time to light a cigarette in his most nonchalant manner and to send a long trail of smoke ceilingward before he replied. "That's precisely the point. He's not a gentleman—he can only try to act like one—and fail. I don't like to see him around you so much. He's not up to you, and you know it."

"He *is* 'up to me,' as you put it—up to anybody. Why you should make distinctions without reason, I don't understand. Christopher Rand is my friend."

"Oh! I thought *I* was! My dear, you can't possibly have us both."

Joan's look at him was amazed. "Why, Bob—what an absurd thing to say!"

"Nevertheless, it's true. If you're going to have him around—and I understand from Mrs. Hopper he comes every day——"

"You didn't ask her that—you couldn't!"

"Ah, you don't deny it! I thought you'd fall into that trap. Of course I didn't ask her—I didn't need to. When I came in, he had the air of the old dog on the hearth—established, confident, ready to growl at the intruder. Any wonder I wanted to kick faithful Brutus? Especially since it used to be my hearth—I was the previous dog. You see I can still growl, myself."

A strange look came into Joan's face. She was silent for a moment, studying Bob's well-cut profile and attenuated cheek. Then she put one hand on his shoulder.

"Bob—have you been drinking hard again?"

He sat up. "No—on my honour." Then his manner changed, and he put his hand quickly on the one which rested on his shoulder. "Forgive me, dear," he said penitently. "Lord knows I don't want to make *that* impression on you. If I'm drunk, it's not with cocktails. . . . I know that was a nasty cut at Rand. I apologize to you."

"You owe the apology to him."

"I'll make it. But, Joan—you know I'm right about his not being up to you."

"You are quite mistaken. He wasn't on the Harvard *Lampoon*—he never rowed for Yale—or made end runs for Princeton. But he has a keen mind, an eager interest in books of the first quality. He's up on all sorts of subjects that interest real men—much better up on them than half the college graduates I've known."

"Well, well!" In spite of his expressed contrition Bob couldn't resist the flippant interjection, and Joan's eyes blazed again.

"His work as an independent builder has attracted the notice of so first-rate an architect as Warren Ellery. That *means* something, Bob."

"In other words, you're mightily interested in him—even so soon after—— Oh, I'm sorry!"—for Joan's hand was quickly withdrawn, and her frown was eloquent of further displeasure. "I don't know what's the matter with me to-night. Yes—I do—I may as well admit it. I don't know just what I'm saying—about anything. The truth is, I'm all on edge with suspense over——"

He got up and began to walk the floor. Joan's frown faded; she saw that something really was upsetting him. Then, all at once, she guessed.

"Bob—a girl!"

He wheeled, staring at her somewhat shamefacedly. "I hate to admit it."

"Why should you?" Her face had lighted. "Is it the real thing this time?"

"It sure is. I'm—I've lost my head over her, to say nothing of my heart. You don't know her—you'd love her if you did. I've been wanting to tell you—but I thought—after asking you to marry me——"

"That was just a gallant gesture, Bob—I understood perfectly. It was the bit of drama you knew I needed in that hour. It took you to play it. Now, go ahead and tell me all about her."

When the telling was done, it was late. Bob stood up reluctantly. "I never go away from you without feeling you've given me something. The Lord knows just what it is—sometimes I think it's a sort of transfusion of blood. Or like switching on an electric current of a high voltage. I feel all-powerful—all aflame with courage."

"Your metaphors are frightfully mixed, Bobby. What you feel usually is a fine glow at my praise of your own genius. What you feel to-night is your heart burning in you for love of a girl, and of course there's nothing more exciting than that. Run along now. . . . My blessing on you. . . . And—don't forget that you're going to make honourable amends to Christopher Rand—for your own sake quite as much as for his."

"Joan"—he turned back from the door to say it—"I'm a jealous fool—a dog in the manger. Rand's all right, and I know it. His father was a Cape Cod fisherman. Mine was a Westchester County market gardener. If either of us can show the stuff those old boys did, we can be proud of ourselves. As to being a gentleman—Chris showed himself a lot more decent than I did, to-night, and you needn't think I don't know it. There—can I say more to put myself right with you, bless your magnificent heart?"

She got up and came to him. "Bobby—I love you."

His arm came about her uninjured shoulder, and he pressed her close.

"I love *you*—I can never tell you how much. You're the sweetest—dearest——"

"Be careful!"

"—girl in the world—except one!"

"You'll get her, Bob. You're really pretty irresistible, you know, when you go about it."

"Thanks for that. It helps. So long—see you again soon, if I may?"

"Of course. The best of luck, old dear!"

Blimp saw him to the door. Blimp had been on guard all the evening. He accepted pleasantly the pat Bob bestowed upon him. When Christopher Rand had patted him, on his way out, Blimp had licked his hand.

XXXI

JOAN, will you go into New York for dinner with me to-night—and then to see that play we read together?"

"*Cyrano de Bergerac?* Why, Chris! How wonderful! I'd love it beyond anything."

"I'll be here with my car—at five—if it's comfortable enough for you."

"Of course it will be. I'm really feeling very much myself."

"Great!—Thank you!"

He went his way in a hurry, after the brief stop at her door in the morning.

It was when he had come to see her for about the fourth time after her accident that she had suddenly said to him, "Why in the world should you go on calling me 'Miss' Joan?" The look which had flashed into his face had rewarded her. "I'm afraid," he had said, "I never think of you as 'Miss' —anything." To which she had responded with a laugh, "I've called you 'Chris' ever since we began to hammer on my workshop together." Both knew that, if he had belonged to her own social group,

as the phrase is used, his formality would have been dropped very early in their acquaintance. And both knew that they now somehow seemed to belong to the same social group, by what subtle change they could hardly have defined. Perhaps the thing both recognized was that in a true democracy there is only one consistent means of making people into groups—similarity, not of birth, wealth, or attainments, but of standards, of tastes, and appreciations. The language is clear enough once the accent is caught!

It turned out a rainy night. That was hard luck, certainly, but rainy nights will come in November. Rand came for Joan, however, in a car she didn't recognize—small but snug, and very comfortable. As he tucked her into it, she had a distinct sense of being taken out of prison.

"It's such fun to be off on a lark," she said warmly.

"I'm glad it seems like a lark to you. It certainly does to me."

He looked it. He also looked a cavalier of whom she could be proud. As for herself, she was wearing the knowing blues and grays she had acquired for Margaret's wedding, though she had thought she never wanted to see those clothes again, and had put them away in the remotest corner of her wardrobe. Tonight, wishing to please Chris, who was going to such pains and expense for her, she took them out. Really,

she had nothing else which could touch the charm of these; why, because of morbid sentiment, should she refuse to wear them and be as attractive as she could? Better to put them on, forget that they stood for anything in particular, and take the curse off them by giving them the association with the bright evening to come which was on the way if Christopher Rand could summon it? When she stood before the mirror, surveying herself, and Mrs. Hopper, looking over her shoulder, breathed at the graceful image an admiring, "My, Miss Joan, you certainly do look a picture!" she had smiled and answered, "That's nice, Hoppy. It's said there are few situations in which a woman doesn't find good clothes sustaining."

"I shouldn't think anybody'd need to be sustained, going out with Mr. Rand," Mrs. Hopper had ventured. "My, Miss Joan, if you don't mind my saying so, I do think he's the most of a *man* of all of them that come round here. That's not saying," she went on hastily, "that I don't think well of them all. And it's not for me to say a word against any of your friends. But I do like Mr. Rand; and the whole village does. There's something *about* him——"

Undeniably there *was* "something about" Christopher Rand which was very winning. As she drove away with him, Joan had a curious sensation of being taken care of in a way different from that in which other men performed such offices. It might be only

that, without being heavy, he was so vigorously strong of body, in contrast to the comparatively unathletic slimness of men like Fullerton, Ramsey, and her brother Sherman; but it seemed more than a matter of physical development—it was a state of mind. Rand was alert for her comfort, whereas any of the others, without lacking in courtesy, would have been much more casual in showing it.

The miles slid by, lights gleamed upon the wet pavements of New York. The car drew up at a parking place; a taxicab brought them on to the front of one of the most famous of the city's hotels. Joan wanted to remonstrate with her companion for choosing it, and to propose a less expensive place, where the food would be precisely as good. But she reflected that she didn't know him well enough for that, and she must let him entertain her in his own way. Therefore, the next hour saw them dining in state, in a charming corner of a great luxurious room, with the music of one of the best orchestras in town in their ears, and delicious food upon their plates.

Rand's manner in this place was particularly acceptable to his companion, it was so free from the self-consciousness she might have expected from one to whom she supposed such dining must be more or less unfamiliar. He didn't seem in the least worried lest he do or say the unaccustomed or provincial thing; he went quietly ahead consulting Joan about what she

would like, then giving the order without seeming in the least impressed or embarrassed by the hovering waiters. A small matter, no doubt, yet having its own significance.

Then, presently, they were at the theatre, in the best orchestra seats procurable. Joan expressed her surprise that such seats could be had, at so late a date, since bookings long in advance were the usual rule for this play with its famous star. Rand explained simply that it was a piece of luck; he had hardly hoped for it himself. But Joan guessed that he had paid a special price for the seats. Evidently, when he wanted things very much, he was used to getting them, wherever he might be. That he had wanted this particular pleasure for her and for himself so much that he had been willing to be at any pains and expense to secure it, was flatteringly evident.

The curtain was up, the play was on. In spite of having seen it twice during the previous season, Joan found herself thrilling to the dramatic, fast-moving scenes, the colourful settings, the lyrical, spontaneous lines, the dazzling action, precisely as she had done the first time she had been present at a performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Precisely?—No, with a distinct difference. On both former occasions she had been in the company of a seasoned theatre-goer; on one of them with Fullerton himself, a competent though not a professional dramatic critic. These companions had

been enthusiastic in their enjoyment and in their praise, though dropping minor and intelligent criticisms here and there, after the manner of those who have every standard of comparison to go by. Fullerton had many times seen Coquelin play the title rôle in the original French. To his mind, Coquelin did not act the part, he *was* it, and the impression had been lasting. In Joan's memory of these two previous experiences, the murmurs of appreciation or of criticism in her ears, the discussion between the acts of the points of comparison between former actors and the one who to-night strode the boards in the dashing costumes and wearing the ever-flourishing sword of Cyrano, were as distinct as the remembrance of the play itself.

To-night, however, she was having a new experience. To sit through the sequence of acts and scenes with one whose motionless silence spoke eloquently of his utter absorption was of itself satisfying. Too often, at the theatre, she had wished for a companion who wasn't so eager to analyse and dissect, and who could give himself to the actions and reactions of the stage without fearing to be found wanting if he didn't let her see from moment to moment just what he was thinking. To her, this famous play was so thrilling, so complete in its power to satisfy, she understood so well its high quality, its matchless spirit and grace, that she welcomed a

kindred enjoyment of it. It suddenly occurred to her, in the middle of the third act, that in spite of her supposedly injured if not broken heart, she had not, of those three performances, found either of the others quite so perfect a pleasure as this. Yet, how, in the name of injured if not broken hearts, could this conceivably be? Was that heart of hers after all in better condition than she had imagined it could be? But—of course not! It was just that, like a child, she could for the moment be easily diverted. With the ending of the evening the old unhappiness would return, the more poignant, undoubtedly, for its brief recession.

The curtain dropped on the third act. Cyrano had made his gallant effort to play, in disguise and substituting for his duller friend Christian, the part of Roxane's lover, the girl herself intoxicated by his impassioned love-making.

ROXANE

Yes . . . that is . . . Love—

CYRANO

Yes, that is Love—that wind
Of terrible and jealous beauty, blowing
Over me—that dark fire, that music . . .
Yet
Love seeketh not his own! Dear, you may take
My happiness to make you happier,
Even though you never know I gave it you—

Only let me hear sometimes, all alone,
The distant laughter of your joy! . . .
I never
Look at you but there's some new virtue born
In me, some new courage. Do you begin
To understand a little? Can you feel
My soul, there in the darkness, breathe on you?
—Oh, but to-night, now, I dare say these things—
I . . . to you . . . and you hear them! . . . It is too much!
In my most sweet unreasonable dreams,
I have not hoped for this! . . .

After the supreme moment of the hour, the act had ended with Roxane's chargings to Cyrano, in his own character, to look after Christian.

ROXANE
Be sure you keep him dry and warm!

CYRANO
Yes, yes—if possible—

ROXANE
See that he remains
Faithful!—

CYRANO
Of course! If—

ROXANE
And have him write to me
Every single day!

CYRANO
That, I promise you!

The audience was still applauding wildly, the lights in the house had not yet gone up, the actors were taking their calls before the great folds of the blue velvet curtain, when Joan became conscious that

Chris had turned and was looking at her. Her spirit was deeply stirred by the never outworn stimulus of the play. The setting of the third act had been almost unbearably beautiful, with its perfect simulation of moonlight in a garden, its vine-clad balcony, the players dimly seen through the half-revealing rays. The voice of the great actor was music of itself. This romantic act, following the bluster and gay braggadocio of the first and the exciting intrigue of the second, was one to play upon the emotions of the most hardened.

After a moment, Joan looked at Chris. He was regarding her intently. Quite irresistibly she returned his look, for she knew herself to be in the closest possible sympathy with the intensity of his feeling at the moment. Curtain never rang down upon that third act, when players had been competent to undertake it, that the audience had not been lifted out of itself by the sheer wonder of the lines, the genius of the whole conception, the stimulus to mad admiration for human courage and generosity.

Gravely Chris smiled at her. Slowly she smiled back. Why not give way to the impulse to join him at this moment in an intense delight in all this beauty and power? He might have no words, such as Lane Fullerton could readily have found, in which to express the nearly inexpressible; indubitably he did possess the full appreciation of it, and was moved, as she was,

to the depths of his far from shallow nature. So, for the space of several seconds, she gave him that which he was giving her, and which, if words could speak that which can't be spoken, might be inadequately described in the simple phrase: *Yes—I know!* Sometimes, unquestionably, that's a pretty close approach!

The fourth act—the fifth—the play was over. Cyrano, beaten, had come to his inevitable, pathetic death in the garden, yet still, in his last breath, the victor—

CYRANO

There is one crown I bear away with me,
And to-night, when I enter before God,
My salute shall sweep all the stars away
From the blue threshold! One thing without stain,
Unspotted from the world, in spite of doom
Mine own!—
And that is——
My white plume!

XXXII

THE two mutely made their way up the aisle out through the foyer to the lobby, slowly pressed through the crowd to the street. It was still raining. Rand left Joan, presently came back, put her into a taxicab and took her up to the place where his car waited. Once more he tucked her in.

"Are you warm? It's turned colder—this rain's nearly a sleet. We'd better be off as fast as we can, before the weather gets thicker. I meant to take you somewhere for some hot coffee at least before we started. Shall we stop for it?"

"I don't need it, thanks. I never was warmer."

"Good. Then we're off, and I'll drive as fast as I can and be safe from skidding. I want to get you home before you're too tired."

"I'm not a bit tired."

"I know you're a good sport, always. It's a meaner night than it set out to be. . . . *Look out, there!—Look where you're going!*"

The admonition was feelingly addressed to a driver who couldn't hear it, and who was driving as fast as he could whether he or anybody else was safe or

not. The car missed Rand's by that nearly imperceptible margin which makes other and saner drivers want to turn and rend the reckless one who needlessly risks his own and presumably more valuable lives to get by a given point first.

"The fool!" Chris growled between his teeth, as his own car swung out into the traffic. "I'd like to give him a free ride on my front bumper right across Forty-second Street at the rush hour."

He had to make his own way slowly until they were well out, for the rain suddenly came down in torrents. Once he stopped at the curb for a few minutes and waited for a violent gust to rush by, for it was impossible to see. Then the storm held up a little, and the car proceeded, the cleaning device on the windshield working at its fastest to keep a clear vision for the driver.

"It's a shame to have brought you out on a night like this," he said, as with a freer road they sped along at a better place.

"I don't mind it in the least. I always did like to be out in a storm," she assured him, with sincerity. "And after being cooped up by the fire for almost three weeks, I'd ride any storm just to feel loose again."

"Sure you're comfortable?"

"Absolutely. And my mind is full of pictures of the play."

"So is mine. I wish we had a fine bright night to

drive home in, after it, so we could idle along, just talking about it—if we *could* talk about it. I'm wondering how I ever dared read the words aloud—I'll never dare again, after hearing him."

"I know. But you will. You'll buy the book—I'd give you my copy except that it was a gift." Her imagination instantly presented her with a vision of the fly-leaf of her copy, inscribed, in Lane Fullerton's small, interesting, very black script—*To Joan, quite superfluously to remind her of an unforgettable evening.* Oh, well, what was the use of being reminded?—"You'll buy the book," she went on, "and keep it where you can put your hand on it, and every so often you'll open it just to refresh your memory. It fits all moods. For instance:

> "But I have no gloves! A pity too!
> I had one—the last one of an old pair—
> And lost that. Very careless of me. Some
> Gentleman offered me an impertinence.
> I left it—in his face."

"I'll never forget that first act," agreed Christopher.

"Nor the second?"

"Nor the second. Nor the third—never the third!"

"Nor any of them. There's a strange magic about *Cyrano*—all acknowledge it who are honest."

"Why shouldn't anybody be honest about what he likes?" asked Christopher.

"You always would be. And in liking *Cyrano* you have a big world of the best drama-lovers with you, and almost all the critics. But there are a lot of people who have to know what the critics say of anything before they venture to like it. Usually, the critics—the best ones—are right, and it's safe to follow them. But I do love the man of independent opinions—who makes his own judgments and evaluations and can defend them. I love him just because he isn't afraid. He may often be wrong; but at least he isn't a mob follower."

"No. I don't like mob followers, either. . . . Oh, the deuce! Is that cleaner going to stick? This rain is getting to be half snow. It's misting inside, too."

"That's because we're talking. We'll stop."

He reached for his handkerchief and wiped the inner side of the windshield in front of his vision. He began to lean forward as he drove, peering intently, for the little bar was having difficulty in moving, and every now and then stopped long enough to let the glass grow thick with the blurring drops which were showing a tendency to freeze. Presently, Chris had to get out of the car to release the bar by clearing away a little mound of wet snow which had become too heavy for it to sweep aside.

"It's lucky it's so late and so few cars on the road," he observed, as he got in for the third time after performing this necessary service. "I never did

enjoy driving blindfold, and this is mighty near that. I'd be sorry I brought you out—if I could be anything but glad!"

"I'm glad, too. Don't keep worrying about me—this is nothing at all. I'm actually enjoying it."

"Hope you are. I'm not. I want to get you safe home, and——"

As he said the words the thing happened. It was over as quickly as it began, but it stopped the breath none the less effectively. Chris had jammed on the brakes, for the dim outlines of an unlighted wagon just ahead of him had given him no choice but to do the only thing he could do to avoid a collision with it, though he took all the chances of an equally disastrous crash into something else. There was no crash into anything, but his car, skidding on the tight brake and the slippery road, had whirled twice around in the twinkling of an eye, and had come to a standstill with its front bumper tight against a big telegraph pole. It was one of those hairbreadth escapes which turn the blood cold.

XXXIII

INSIDE the car there was the long minute's silence which follows such a shock—the mental not the physical shock. Then Christopher Rand, with a mighty breath of relief, threw his arm about Joan and drew her so close to him that she felt as though in another instant she might be quite crushed in the unconscious strength of his embrace.

"Oh, God!" he breathed, without releasing her, "what if I'd killed you!"

"You'd have killed yourself, too. That smash would have taken us both."

"I'd have wanted it to."

She let her head rest against his shoulder; she was suddenly and unexpectedly a little faint. The sight of the gaunt telegraph pole as it loomed through the falling sleet in the car's own light, and the realization of its closeness, recalled Bob Ramsey's accident, with its fatal consequences. The pole had a sinister look, like a slim but puissant giant. She couldn't keep on looking at it.

The driver of the wagon opened the car door. "Hey! You come almighty near gettin' yours that time. What the hell——"

"Shut that door!" Rand roared at him. "And then get yourself a light at the nearest house. You'd have had only yourself to thank if we'd hit you. *Get out!*"

The driver "got out," slamming the door and muttering. Chris hadn't moved a muscle, except to press Joan's head into his shoulder with his left hand, from which he had somehow removed his wet glove. She might have been a child, by the way he cradled her. She closed her eyes and felt her cheek against the rough warmth of his coat. Somehow, she didn't, at the moment, care for anything except to be held like that. It was the most comforting thing that had ever happened to her! She might have been dead, smashed against that great, ugly, wooden pole. By a miracle, she wasn't. Instead, she was being cherished in a man's powerful right arm, and she could hear his deep breathing as he held her resting there and thanked his God that he hadn't been the innocent means of ending her life. Somehow, she could sense his thudding heartbeats; they shook her a little, or so it seemed. . . .

It was time to withdraw herself and sit up—she knew it. There could be no excuse for staying where she was longer than was needful to recover her shaken spirit. She realized with amazement that she didn't want to take herself out of her present situation. Nevertheless, since she wasn't of the type of girl who adventurously courts opportunities and excuses for

such intimate contacts, she did draw away from the arm which seemed to surrender her with reluctance.

"All right now?" his solicitous voice asked very gently. Could it be the same voice which had shouted so roughly at the intruding driver of the wagon? Apparently not, for it continued anxiously, while his eyes tried to see how she was looking, in the dim interior of the car: "*Sure* you're all right?"

"All right, thank you. I'm ashamed to have been so babyish."

"Who wouldn't be? I felt rather odd myself, for a minute or two. I'll have you home in no time now—even if we go pretty slowly. It can't be more than a couple of miles. I want to see you drinking something hot."

In spite of the luxurious comfort of her outer coat of gray squirrel, once away from Chris's arm Joan felt a nervous tendency to shiver. She was glad to see the lights of Crossways through the storm. They had made the brief remainder of the journey in complete silence, but it was a silence which, presumably to both of them, contained considerable thinking.

"Please come in and have something hot, too. Mrs. Hopper'll have left it ready."

"I will, though I mustn't give this motor a chance to freeze. I'll leave it running."

They went in, Chris's arm through hers, the sleet beating in their faces till the last moment. Then the

heavy door shut them into the warmth and soft light and peace of the old house. Chris helped her out of the squirrel coat, Joan pulled off her hat, and they went into the dining room. A silver thermos held smoking hot coffee, there was the usual plate of delicately hearty sandwiches. They ate and drank, though not with hunger or thirst. They were still unready to talk. Coming so near another world, all in an instant, somehow doesn't make people voluble immediately thereafter.

"Will you sit down by the fire a minute?" Joan suggested, oblivious of the running motor outside. Chris seemed oblivious of it, too, for he followed Joan into the beckoning shadowy room with its flickering firelight as though he were helpless to take himself away quite yet. She sank upon the couch, and he stood upon the hearth rug before her. He hadn't removed his heavy outer coat; he bulked large in the low-ceiled room.

"I was just going to tell you, when—that happened —about my plans. This evening was a little celebration, for me. Day before yesterday, Mr. Warren Ellery invited me to go over to England with him, in the place of a man who had been expecting to go—one of his assistants. The other man's delayed, but will come later. I'll be gone only six weeks, but it'll give me the chance to see some of the things I've always wanted to see."

"Why, Chris! How splendid!"—Oh, dear Lord—

was this the same old story? Was every friend she had off on affairs of his own? And why in the world didn't she want him to go? And why—why—should her instant wonder be whether Esther Ellery were to be of the party?

He went on: "It does seem pretty splendid. You see, there's an old church in this county to be restored—it's to be made a copy of a certain famous little church in Warwickshire. Mr. Ellery—I can't believe it, Joan—is going to give me the job, under his direction. But he thinks it's a great chance for me to get some ideas of my own. I don't know why he should take so much interest in helping me. Of course, I'm mighty lucky he does."

But Joan knew. She knew instantly. Unquestionably, Warren Ellery was being spurred by his daughter—she was his only child and accustomed to get what she wanted. That was—at least partly—why he was being so generous to an obscure young man—though probably Ellery hadn't any idea that Esther wanted Chris for herself. She was quite clever enough to keep him in ignorance of that. Her father mightn't even suspect it. Chris wasn't of Esther's "class." But—would she mind that? She wouldn't. And why should she? If ever the desirable figure of a man stood before any woman, that man stood before Joan Dare now. Obscure or not obscure, what did it matter? He was the real thing!

She forced herself to make the right, enthusiastic comments on his news. Chris replied—a trifle absently now, seeming not to be wholly occupied with his own good fortune. He appeared to be studying her rather closely—he didn't take his eyes off her. But the tall clock in the hall suddenly and brazenly announced that it was two in the morning of the coming day, and he made a movement toward her.

"I mustn't keep you up another minute. Perhaps I won't see you again before I go. I'll be in New York all day to-morrow, and we sail early Saturday morning."

His eyes still intent—it occurred to her that they were unusually fine eyes—he held out his hand. She didn't take it. She came up to him. There was just one way of ending this extraordinary evening. She knew he wouldn't venture it—mightn't even welcome it—certainly wouldn't expect it on her initiative. But it had to be. They had been near death together and had come through. He was to sail across what might be stormy seas. Weeks were to pass. He was her friend. Esther Ellery——

Of course it was Esther Ellery who did it. She would arm him against Esther Ellery, who was accustomed to have everything she wanted.

Joan knew how. She wasn't exactly a novice at the art of making people think about her when away from her. She was fastidious and self-contained, but she

could also be daring and quite capable of letting herself go if she saw a reason—if she only felt a reason. She felt one now—an amazingly powerful one, considering the ever-present image of Lane Fullerton in the background. . . . Where, by the way, was that image at this moment? A considerable blur, unquestionably, if not absolutely wiped out!

She lifted her face—it was a glowing, audacious face now, with a provocative, inviting little smile just touching it. . . . The next instant she had been kissed as such a man might be expected to kiss her—putting his whole personality into it. Then, before he could speak, Joan murmured as lightly as she could manage:

"Just for good-bye, you know. You're such a dear friend—and we almost crashed an hour ago.—And—the ocean's rather wide——"

"It'll bring me back," Christopher Rand said under his breath. And without looking at her again, he went out into the hall, and through it, and closed the heavy old outer door behind him.

On the other side of it, Joan Dare, noting how that kiss seemed to retain its original efficacy upon her lips, said to Christopher Rand, now speeding his motor outside and unaware that he was being spoken to: "I'm glad I didn't let you go without *that!* . . . Maybe you won't forget it. . . . Maybe I sha'n't, myself. . . . You *certainly didn't mind it,* if I know the signs! . . . And I *don't* want to lose you—for a friend!"

XXXIV

"MISS JOAN, here's somethin' Chris Rand left for you."

Joan didn't reprove Jenkins for speaking thus intimately of Rand, though for the first time she wanted to. Jenkins had known Rand for years, as the village knew him, first as a young carpenter, then as an ambitious artisan speedily acquiring a shop and beginning to take contracts for building in his own name. Now, though he had become a real personage in the little town, it still knew and spoke of him as Chris Rand. Though it should raise him to its highest office, it would continue thus to name him, as a son. Joan knew well enough that the familiarity meant genuine affection, by no means lacking in respect. Everybody admired Chris because he had "made his way." And now, though he was sailing across the Atlantic in the company of a famous city architect, he was still that favourite son of whom his fellow townsmen were to be proud. No matter how well dressed he now might be, nor how he might go about with people like the Dares and Ellerys, so long as he didn't change his manner of genuinely friendly interest in everybody—he was theirs.

"Thank you, Jenky." She received the humpy envelope, wondering.

"There's a key in there, Chris said. It's to a house he's been buildin'. He wanted you to keep it for him."

"Very well, I will."

By the living-room fire, she read the brief note. It was the first she had ever had from Christopher Rand.

DEAR JOAN:

I wonder if you'd care to go up some sunny day, when it's not too cold, before we get any heavy snowfalls that will shut off the road, and see how the house on the hill looks in December. I've moved a few things up there, and a fire is laid that will roar up the chimney like a conflagration and warm you in a jiffy. I'd like to think of you spending half an hour up there, if you happen to want to. If the arm isn't fit for it yet, Jenkins could drive you up.

Here's the key, anyhow. You'll keep that for me, whether you go up to the house or not, won't you?

Good-bye and good luck,

CHRIS.

Well! Should she go? The hill top would be a lonely place without Chris. But—this house—Crossways—was suddenly a lonely place without Chris! It was extraordinary how she was missing him already, though he could barely have sailed. Her mind had followed him; she had looked up his ship and knew the hour of sailing—very early in the morning, as he had said. These daily visits of his for the last three weeks had been increasingly interesting to her, but she really hadn't known how she had come to look forward to them till they were over. Had it been just

because she was a semi-invalid with her broken arm and bruised shoulder, and so bored with getting through the period of inactivity? When she came to try to analyse the singular charm of those evenings, what had Christopher Rand done to give it to them?

He had come in, always, as though he were immensely glad to come. And often he had brought her something. Not flowers, not boxes of candy, not fripperies. Some newspaper clippings; a sturdy little rare evergreen growing in a painted green box; some snapshots of an old church which interested him; once a funny little old chair straight from Cape Cod, over which she had exclaimed with delight. . . . She tried to remember what Lane Fullerton had ever done to give her special pleasure. He had given her the copy of *Cyrano de Bergerac*—she could recall nothing else. When he had come to the house, it was usually because he was tired, or depressed, and knew that he would find rest and cheer. That had been in its way flattering, but except that he brought his own interesting personality—which perhaps ought to be enough—had he shown any unselfish desire to make any return for that which he found in abundance? If people really cared for other people, didn't they always want to lavish some special attention upon them?

What about Bob Ramsey? His visits also had been always to get, not to give. He had come rushing to

Joan to consult her over something he had done; to receive her encouragement, her praise, her stimulation of all his powers. When he had received that for which he came, when he had been lighted at her fires, he had rushed away again, grateful, certainly, but taking it as a matter of course that he should have found those fires burning. . . . Well, he had asked her to marry him, she mustn't forget that. Asked her in a moment of being sorry for her. Or—was it that? Hadn't it been done impulsively, because the dramatic influence of the marriage he had just witnessed was still strong upon his impressionable temperament; because Joan was looking more attractive than he had ever seen her, and his admiration for beauty was fired; because—yes, partly because he was sorry over her unhappiness, but much more because it was a bit of absorbing play-making, and he had known positively that she would refuse? He had run no risk, he had made a stunning gesture, he would make use of the whole thing sometime as the foundation for some scene which would go over to a reader or an audience because it was so convincingly "human."

But Christopher Rand—why, he was the sort of man who cares whether other people are happy or unhappy—cares enough to take pains. How he had lighted up those evenings he had spent with Joan Dare! When one thought of it, it was amazing to have to admit that not the older man of the world with his

sophistications and graces, his utter charm, his fine looks; not the younger man with his genius for passionate expression, his exciting ways, had ever given Joan any such sense of being thought about and cared for as the Cape God "carpenter" had given her. When he had come into the room, she had the feeling, more or less vague at first, but growing more definite with each succeeding visit, that somebody had arrived whose presence meant that the room was full, not empty. When he sat beside her on the couch, looking into the fire, sometimes talking, sometimes silent; or stood before the fire with elbow on the chimney piece, looking down at her as they discussed some interesting subject; or strolled over to the piano to play and sing some simple yet touching or amusing song, he pleased and attracted and—yes, she could almost say he satisfied her need for companionship as few people did. Anyhow, he had satisfied her sufficiently so that now his absence left a very perceptible blank.

On the fifth evening after he had sailed from New York, Joan became conscious that she would give just about anything that could be asked of her to hear his voice in the hall, to see his interesting face and sinewy figure in the doorway, to have him come in with his effect of bringing in fresh air and vitality and actual power with which to reinforce her tired and unhappy spirit.

In spite of all her absorption in Lane Fullerton, had she ever missed him in exactly that way—as though something that supported her had been withdrawn? There is a difference in the way one misses people; was she missing Chris not because of the excitement he brought her, but because of the deep content he gave her?

On the morning of the sixth day she woke with the instant intention of making use of that key! For early December the day was mild, the sun was shining brilliantly, there was no snow. There had been little snow as yet, and no rains for a fortnight. The wood road up the hill would be open and the ground hard. Jenkins could drive the roadster; Joan's arm, though out of the sling, wasn't ready for forcing a steering wheel to take a car around difficult uphill turns on a rough road. She chose midday for the trip, and ordered Jenkins to be at the door at eleven.

At a quarter before twelve, the roadster came competently up the last curve of the steep hillside.

"The house is just as nice as ever. Isn't that a nice house, Jenky?"

"That's a good house, Miss Joan. I saw it couple times before, when Chris brought me up. Not since he finished it. He put a lot of good timber into it. 'Twon't blow down in any gales—and I guess it'll get 'em up here."

"He probably did put in good timber. Do you

know, it hadn't occurred to me to think of that. It *is* a point, isn't it?"

"I'd say so. Lots o' folks build flimsy houses, just for looks. Then they trim 'em up—gewgaws. Stick on things for the sake of stickin' 'em. But I don't mind that so much. Let 'em do it, if it suits 'em. But when they build houses out o' poor stuff, cheap, just for show, then they cut off their own noses, to my way of thinkin'."

"Suppose they haven't the money for the best materials, Jenky, but still want a home?"

"They can put up a smaller house. One room at a time, but have it right. I guess that's always been Chris's motto, anyhow. Up on Cape Cod, where him an' I come from——"

"Did *you* come from Cape Cod? I always thought you were a Vermonter."

"I worked up in Vermont some years before I come to stay at Crossways. But I was born an' grew up on the Cape. You know the houses they built there a hundred an' fifty years ago—standin' just as strong as they was when they was built. Timbers twice the size most builders use now.—Goin' to get out? Go easy now, Miss Joan—don't hit that arm!"

Jenkins, too, was taking care of her! It was a new sensation.

Joan left him roaming around the outside of the house while she fitted the key into the lock and let

herself in. She came to the door of the living room. She saw the fire laid, as Chris had promised—a great, skilfully placed pile. A box of matches was upon the chimney piece. She crossed the room and touched off the paper under the kindling. It wasn't two minutes before a big roaring fire was changing the chilly room into a place where one might safely spend an hour.

She looked about her. A man's room, certainly, upon which there was not the touch of Esther Ellery's hand, nor that of any other woman, not to mention an interior decorator. Yet it was exceedingly attractive. The portrait of the sea captain over the fireplace was the only strong "note of colour," such as artists advise. Yet the place was not dull. How could it be, with all those windows, and the sunlight streaming in?

The old desk bookcase held rows of books. Three comfortable old chairs, a big table holding a lamp—yes, the lamp was one worthy of the room; it was the one thing she thought Chris must have bought for it. It was an oil lamp, but had a solid base, and a parchment shade with a ship scene on it; it fitted beautifully. And before the fireplace there lay a strip of rag carpeting, in blues and greens and oranges—faded, but the better for the fading, since it brought it into tone with the portrait. Whether Chris had been conscious of this touch of harmony, she couldn't guess.

She did like the room. And she liked it that Chris hadn't let anybody arrange it for him, or bring in anything he didn't want. She also liked his wanting her to come up here and see it, in his absence. She drew up a chair before the hearth and sat looking into the depths of the singing flames. She forgot all about Jenkins for the space of half an hour, while she mused and pondered. What was she doing here? Why should she be sitting alone in the house Christopher Rand had built for himself—*thinking about him?* For she was thinking about him, almost to the exclusion of other thoughts. She was seeing him here, and what was more, wishing him here. What had happened since a few weeks before, when, though Chris was here, she had been able to think only of Lane Fullerton? Was she so fickle? Or—had she come to her senses and discovered which of these two might be to her that which she needed most—not for an evening's amusement and distraction, but for the sober business of everyday life?

Yet, even with Chris, she had known moments which had by no means suggested sober business. How about those moments following the near crash into the pole? How about that good-bye kiss, which, though she herself had offered it, had been no affair which she had had to carry through by herself. How about—seeing him again? When one has taken leave of another in such a fashion, the possibilities attend-

ant upon the next meeting are likely to be worth speculating upon. . . . Meanwhile, she would put the fire out and go home, by no means sorry that she had come. The key to Christopher Rand's house began to seem somehow like the key with which other doors might be opened—upon other fires.

XXXV

A FORTNIGHT later there came a cable from Morton Dare to his daughter Joan:

We sail *Berengaria* Saturday for Christmas with you.

Joan spent the following week in a wild and joyous effort to be ready for them. Crossways must wear its most welcoming air for the two who owned and loved it. If the ship were on time, it would get in the day before Christmas; Joan prayed that no storms might delay it. To have her long-absent father and mother there for the Day seemed almost too good to be true.

She had had several brief letters from Christopher Rand; they had been hurriedly written notes of his trip, enclosing cards and photographs of the things that interested him. Almost no personal word came with them. "I know you've seen this, so you'll know how it appeared to me." "I'd have liked to look at this with you." Now and then such a statement suggested that he thought of her, but if he did, that was all he said about it. He didn't mention the Ellerys; whether he was travelling with them, Joan had no notion. But he had crossed with them—she knew well enough what that meant. Even though in late No-

vember there couldn't be much loitering about the decks on moonlight evenings, there were opportunities enough during a five days' crossing for a girl like Esther Ellery to make the most of. Between shore and shore, she would get to know Christopher Rand extremely well; there couldn't be any doubt of it. Joan could imagine how she would look on shipboard. Just the right clothes, trim, audacious, setting off her piquant small face, which would be always full of vivacity and colour. Though the decks might be too cold for loitering, they would be great lanes for brisk tramping. Joan's trained imagination presented her with pictures of the two; the tall young man with the lean, interesting face, in heavy ulster and cap, his hands in his pockets; the slim girl, the top of whose head would just about reach his shoulder. She'd be wearing tawny furs—yes, Esther, with her Titian hair would be sure to choose tawny furs. If the seas were a little rough—only a little rough—Esther would be sure to see that Chris had his arm through hers, to hold her steady. And they would walk and walk, getting their lungs full of the cold, energizing sea air; talking, laughing, looking at each other. And Esther would draw him on—how she would draw him on!—being fascinated with him from the start.

Joan knew the game herself; she had played it so many times. She had made at least a dozen crossings of the Atlantic during the last few years since she

had grown up, not to mention those in her childhood. And on each of those dozen crossings there had been somebody with whom to sit in secluded moonlit corners, on summer nights, or to pace the decks in winter. She knew just how the interest in one's companion grew with the passing days and nights. It was extremely apt to become a concentrated interest—a positive absorption—in no time at all. In her experience, the few days' accelerated companionship usually resulted in being asked to marry her fellow traveller, whether she had ever set eyes on him before their embarkation or not. Once or twice she had been strongly tempted to accept one of these hasty offers, but had delayed in favour of a further acquaintance before committing herself, and had been glad of her wariness. But—Christopher Rand had never before been exposed to the alluring darings of a girl like Esther Ellery; in spite of his Cape Cod ancestry, mightn't she take him off his feet? Even the sturdy nephew of a sea captain might be bowled over if the waves of witchery rose too high. Esther was undoubtedly dangerous!

Why should Joan care? . . . She didn't care. . . . She found she did care. . . .

When the *Berengaria* was warped into her dock, Joan was on the pier. Nothing could have kept her away. She was wrapped snugly in the gray squirrel coat, and her dark-lashed eyes looked eagerly out

from under the hat with the "blob" of sea-blue on its brim which had done its part in making Bob Ramsey find her gipsylike beauty provocative of an offer of marriage. Her face was alive with anticipation and excitement; people noted her; men moved into closer proximity, wondering whether she might be waiting for a fiancé or a husband. It must be one or the other—she was no neglected spinster, that they would bet on.

She saw the Dares at the rail; she waved frantically, knowing herself lost in the crowd of welcoming, waving people on the pier, but waiting for the moment when her face could become clear to them. Presently she caught the answering signals.—They saw her! Her mother's handkerchief was out, her father's hat was in the air. The dear, dear things! What a stunning—absolutely stunning pair they were!

They came down the gangway: Madelaine Dare in her luxurious mink-and-sable coat and little smart hat, looking from top to toe the sophisticated traveller, her fine eyes, like Joan's, full of joy; Morton Dare, distinguished as always by his handsome, youthful face beneath his nearly white hair, seeming to Joan the most attractive father a girl ever had. Then she was in their arms, and having some difficulty in keeping from becoming absurdly emotional. It was so good to see them, after all the lonely weeks!

She had seen nobody else who came ashore. Expecting to see nobody else whom she could care to meet, once her eyes had fallen upon her own she had ceased to search the crowd for familiar faces. It didn't matter what acquaintances might be arriving on this ship, she didn't want to be bothered with them. She just wanted to have the Dares rushed through the customs and then into the waiting comfortable motor she had engaged to take them straight out to Crossways.

"Why, here's Miss Dare!" A gay voice cried it over her shoulder. Turning, she saw Esther Ellery, looking all that Joan's most vivid imaginings could have painted her, a little dashing figure straight out of a Parisian fashion plate, her perfectly gloved hand extended. And behind Esther, her father—and Christopher Rand.

After all, of the three of them, Joan really saw only Chris. Was he—had he always been so good-looking, so intelligent looking? For he did look intelligent—that seemed to be the word to describe him. Even beside such a man as Warren Ellery, one with the quietly assured bearing that goes so unmistakably with position and importance, Christopher Rand was by no means negligible. And it seemed nobody neglected him! Even as she greeted Joan, Esther gave a sparkling look back at Christopher.

"It's been such fun for us, crossing with your

father and mother," she cried. "They're such ducks, and they've been so amusing. And I want to warn you, Miss Dare, that your mother and Chris have become almost inseparable pals! Half the time I've had to give up my tramps with him to her."

"Half of them?" questioned Madelaine Dare gaily. "When you two have literally walked across the Atlantic together?"

Joan found her hand in Chris's being shaken vigorously. His clear gray eyes looked into hers. His face was deeply tanned by the voyage, he seemed even more vigorously alive than he always had—perhaps it was his rough, well-tailored outer coat which made his shoulders look so broad and competent.

"It's good to be back," he said.

"Won't you drive out with us, Chris? We have lots of room."

"I'd like to, thank you, Joan. But I think Mr. Ellery wants me to go to his office with him."

"And have dinner with us afterward," added Esther Ellery, with a little of air of proprietorship. For an instant Joan thought Esther was going to put her hand through his arm. She didn't—quite.

That was all there was about that. Joan drove away with her father and mother and didn't turn her head to see Chris going off with the Ellerys. Oh, well, it was all settled, of course, or on the way to be. Esther Ellery would get what she wanted. She had

known what she wanted, from the start, that was why she was getting it. Joan hadn't known. She had had the association of months with Christopher Rand, recognizing in a way his growing ability, liking him, actually admiring him. And all the time thinking of Lane Fullerton. It was like having headlights on some dashing car blinding your eyes to some splendid fire beside the road at which you might have warmed yourself—if you had seen it. Now, someone else was warming herself at the fire, while you tramped on, alone. . . . The analogy wasn't a very good one, but it was to Joan a persistent one. She hadn't seen—she hadn't seen; she'd been so blinded, somehow, by those years of thinking that there was no man in the world so delightful or desirable as the one who—why, he had never even thought of her except as one of the charming Dares all of whom he liked so much—and whose country home he liked even better, perhaps! . . . "Jonathan"—yes, that was a good name for her contact with him—a relationship precisely like that with some nice boy to whom he had taken an affectionate fancy!

But it was good to see Morton and Madelaine Dare. Joan gave herself up with at least half her mind and heart to being glad of their presence. She felt afresh, as she always did when she saw them again after a long absence, the satisfying delight of their companionship. They were so happy to be at home;

they went about so enjoying all Crossways' beauties and comforts, to which, as always, they had brought new treasures. Finally, they were ready to sit down before the fire, after the best dinner Mrs. Hopper and Cook had been able to plan. They had gone out to the kitchen themselves, the handsome, smiling pair, to praise the food and the service, and to say again how much the nicest place in the world home was, after all.

"Then why not stay in it, Mrs. Dare?" Cook had made bold to ask. At which Morton and Madelaine had looked at each other, laughing, and Mrs. Dare had answered, "I really wonder why not, myself, Martha." And Mr. Dare had added, "Some day we'll come back and really settle down, you know. Meanwhile—we're here, and that was a better dinner of its kind than I've ever had in Paris." At which Martha's ruddy face had glowed a deeper red.

By the fire they talked things over, father, mother, and daughter. Joan watched them, and answered their questions, and was as gay as suited the occasion. She loved their attractive, graceful persons, and their careless, captivating ways, and their sane, original points of view about things and people. She asked them questions, too, and had their answers, and the evening was—as that of a family reunion—all she could have asked of it. And all the while there was that image at the back of her brain, picturing Christo-

pher Rand dining with the Ellerys; Esther in some exquisite Parisian frock making enchanting eyes at Chris. She must know him so well by now—so perilously well—and was so in love with him. . . .

"You know," Madelaine Dare was saying, leaning back in a corner of the big soft couch, looking into the fire with softly happy eyes, and bringing back her daughter's wandering attention quite completely, "I was very much interested and delighted, when I met him on the ship, Joan, to see what our former young carpenter has made of himself. I always knew that boy had it in him to be something. Of course, it's several years since we first began to notice him, and I've seen him at various times since—and always got the same impression—*Here's somebody—take note of him!* But I couldn't help being astonished, after all, to see what a real individuality he's developed. Why, when I first caught a glimpse of him, at a table just across from ours, with the Ellerys, I was attracted to him, without at all recognizing him except that there was something faintly familiar. Then Mr. Ellery saw us, and got up and came over, and I asked him who the nice young man was with his daughter—thinking, you see, that perhaps I ought to know him. And when he said, 'Oh, that's a new protégé of mine—I consider him a find—and so, I shall have to admit, does Esther. His name's Christopher Rand, from your

own community up there in Westchester,' I was as surprised as though I hadn't said all along that Chris Rand would never stay behind a carpenter's bench, clever though he was with tools. So, of course, after that——"

"After that," Morton Dare went on, "your mother —who is still young and daring enough to enjoy a nice young man—made friends with Sir Christopher Wren —she predicts he'll be as famous as Wren some day. Of course, I'm skeptical, as becomes a man who deals in clay, doesn't lay on colour!" And he smiled at his wife, who smiled back enjoyingly. "They measured off some five hundred miles around the decks, I should say, on the way across, striding along at a terrific pace, and making Esther as jealous as though your mother really were a deadly rival. I'm not sure she wasn't. Anyhow, pretty little Esther did a lot of scheming to break up the match. She even enlisted me, on one particular sunny afternoon, when she'd found Madelaine and Chris talking their heads off in some sequestered nook out of the wind."

"Oh, but he has such a fine mind," Mrs. Dare insisted. "Lane Fullerton, who came around in Paris with Margaret, says he found Chris mighty interesting himself, when they were getting up some plays you had here last summer. . . . By the way, what do you think, Joan, of the Fullertons, *as* the Fullertons? Is it going to be successful?"

Joan never knew quite how she answered that question, or any others of those with which both the Dares plied her, once they had begun to discuss their old friend, Lane. The talk went on for a long time before Madelaine Dare finally pulled herself out of her corner and said decidedly:

"But we don't need to say it all to-night, do we? Lane and Margaret will do well enough, I'm sure. This child is tired, in spite of her plucky smiles. That broken arm took something out of you, didn't it, Johnny? I'm tired myself, now I notice it. Let's go to bed. Do we hang up our stockings, lamb?"

XXXVI

IT WAS eleven o'clock, Joan noted, as, having kissed them both at the door of their big room, bright with fire and candlelight, she came into her own. She was weary beyond any words to express. There was a cheerful fire burning in the small fireplace, and she sank into the comfortable big chair in front of it with the feeling that she'd sit there without moving all night rather than go to the trouble of undressing. Was it physical weariness? It felt like it, yet she knew it wasn't. It was that inexpressible fatigue of the spirit, compared with which mere physical exhaustion is a thing to wish for. . . .

The sound of a motor stopping at the gateway in the hedge. Joan's windows were just above; she raised her head to listen, for the quick footsteps on the flagged walk sounded like Chris's. Of course it couldn't be Chris—he was dining in town with the Ellerys. . . . Yet one didn't dine all night. . . . The knocker rose and fell. Yes, that was Chris's knock—he had a way of his own with that knocker.

Where was that weariness of hers? She was out of her chair and down the stairs in a flash, to forestall any other opening of the door. . . . If it shouldn't

be Chris, after all. . . . And if it was, should she be showing all this eagerness? She neither knew nor cared.

She opened the door, and he stood there with an anxiously smiling face, on the old stone doorstep.

"Oh, you're still up!" he whispered relievedly. "May I come in? Is it too late? I saw your lights—I couldn't go by. . . . I wasn't going to knock but once."

"Do come in. Everybody's only just gone upstairs. I'll put another log on the fire. Shall we talk till midnight? There's so much to hear."

"Then I may take off my coat—and stay a little?"

"Of course. Haven't you been away for ages—*ages*, Chris?"

He was out of his heavy seagoing coat and after her into the dark living room by the time she had reached the switches which would light it.

"Won't the firelight do?" he begged. "Here, I'll make it blaze up. I've thought of this spot all the way across the ocean."

She watched him as he rebuilt the smouldering fire, which in another ten minutes would have been out entirely. All the long evening, while the Dares had sat talking before it, it had been bright and sufficient, but somehow it hadn't warmed Joan's unnaturally chilly hands. Now—well—this was Chris's fire, and Chris was there before it. All the room was warm and light with the ruddy glow of it.

He sat down beside her on the couch. "Did I hear you say I'd been away for ages?"

"I believe that's what I said."

"Did you possibly mean—you know it's been only six weeks—do you possibly mean that—the time's seemed long?—But, of course—not able to work at your job——"

"The time has seemed long, but it wasn't because I couldn't work at my job. It couldn't have seemed long to you, though, with all you've done and seen. I want to hear about it, you know."

"Do you? Not just yet. . . . The time seemed long to me, Joan—and do you want to know why?"

"I'd be very much interested to know why."

He was looking steadily at her in the firelight. She wondered, as any woman will, what he saw. She had worn all the evening a gay frock of crimson with narrow bands of black fur; she had put it on to help disguise a certain look she was conscious of—that look of weariness which she felt had come upon her at the moment when Esther Ellery had said so lightly yet so possessively, "And have dinner with us afterward." Had the look gone now? She hoped so. She certainly wasn't weary at this moment; she was conscious of nothing except the breathless wish to have him go on talking—to lead him on—to make him say what she wanted to hear. Would he—*would* he? He must. She couldn't bear it if he didn't. All in the

world she wanted was to keep him, now that at last she knew what he was, and what a fool she would be to let him go. . . . If it weren't too late. . . . If he weren't here just to tell her—oh, dear Lord—*could* he just be going to tell her about Esther?—No, if that were all, he wouldn't have bothered to do it to-night. It must be he——

She gazed back at him, giving him all the invitation she knew those dark-lashed eyes of hers were capable of. She would fight—fight to get him. If this were not love that had flamed so furiously in her heart, then it was jealousy—and jealousy is the sure test, she knew. And the jealousy she had felt when Lane Fullerton had married Margaret Faulkner was as nothing beside this wild longing to make Christopher Rand her own, to take him away from Esther Ellery and all other women. She would lead him on with all the power she possessed—lead him on. . . .

But he needed very little leading on. Was this Chris who moved so close to her on the couch and spoke so urgently? Why, she had always thought him so wonderfully self-contained!

"Joan—would you have kissed me good-bye if you hadn't cared anything about me?"

She shook her head, her eyes meeting his steadily. Her heart began to beat so fast it seemed to be a live thing, and might leap out of her breast. Oh, dear Lord, again! But it was a different cry to Him—a

cry of utter thankfulness. It was coming, this thing she knew now she wanted—it was here! The lights were up again upon the little stage of her life—the curtain was rising on the third act—the act that in plays with happy endings made everything come right. She had laughed sometimes, with other young cynics, at plays with too happy endings; but ah, when it came to one's own—that was another story. Did one want the lights to go down on tragedy, when just a turn of the hand, the right word spoken, might have made the difference? To take poison with joy just round the corner, so the critics would say approvingly, "Yes, that's life!" Why not run to the corner and see if joy might not be on the way? Wouldn't that be life, too? Anyhow——

"I thought you wouldn't—I was sure of it. Joan—in all these weeks I've—never lost the feel of it. It brought me back—daring to hope I'd——"

"Get another?" she murmured. She was smiling at him now—but the smile was crushed out of existence under the sudden, violent pressure of his lips. . . . Then—

"Oh, God!" he whispered, as he held her fast in his eager arms. "Have I really got you—after all these years? It isn't—just a kiss, is it? You'll marry me—Joan?"

"I'd like nothing better, Chris."

He held her off presently to look at her and exult over her.

"You haven't felt that way very long, have you?—that you'd like nothing better?"

"Not very long."

"I knew you hadn't. I thought I'd never be able to make you."

"When did you begin to try?"

"Oh!" He laughed a little. "I didn't dare begin to *try*—till this summer. Up to then, I'd only been trying to make myself fit to try. But I began to *want* to try—which means, of course, I began to love you—when your father first had me come over here, four years ago, to do some little job of carpentering. I saw you then. That was enough. You hadn't a look for me or a thought. You were all for the job—it was something about your room, making it bigger by opening up a partition—and you came and stood around and asked me questions."

"I did have a thought about you. I thought you were a clever workman. And my mother thought—she said so just to-night—that you would be somebody some day. You had the makings, and she saw them. She's a very discerning person—portrait painters are, you know. But I'll admit I didn't see what she did—not then. I see it now!"

"Do you?" He laughed. "I'm going to make

something of myself, Joan—for you. It's been you I've worked for—not even daring to believe I'd ever get you. I thought Lane Fullerton—or Bob Ramsey—or Hugh McNair——"

Not even the mention of Fullerton's name had power to stir her now. She was too deeply content.

"And *I* thought—Esther Ellery——"

But he was silent about that, and she knew why. Esther had tried, and he knew she had tried. He wouldn't tell Joan of that, and she mustn't want him to.

"Mr. Ellery wants me to come into his office. He's insisting on my taking a short trip with him tomorrow, to see the remains of the church he's to let me rebuild. That's why I had to come by here tonight, as soon as I could get away, because I couldn't come in the morning. Shall I go into his office, Joan, or keep on on my own?"

"Why—which do you want to do? It would give you a tremendous chance to advance rapidly, wouldn't it?"

"It would, and I suppose I'd be a fool to refuse it. I'm not going to refuse it. But—I'm going to be on my own again just as soon as I can get there, you may believe."

She looked up at him. "You'll always be on your own, Chris. You're no other man's man. You may get some training in Mr. Ellery's office, but you'll

come out of it to use your own name again on your own office."

Until the clock struck one, they sat before the fire, now talking, now silent. Then, with a long sigh of reluctance, Chris rose to go.

"But I'm coming back," he said. "And you're going to marry me—when?"

"When do you want me to?"

"To-night!"

She laughed. "Is this the cool carpenter from Cape Cod I've known so long?" she demanded.

"No, it's the blazing builder from Britain you've never known," he answered. "You've thought me cool, have you? Then listen. I've been burning up with love for you for four years, and just pouring on water every hour of every day to keep from being consumed. How could I help it, with you the lovely thing you are?"

"I'm not lovely."

"I never," he said, with sudden gravity, "saw in all my life anyone with such a beautiful face, such a beautiful voice, such beauty all through her and about her. Why, you're just Beauty itself—only you don't know it, and that's the best part of it. Ask your mother—she ought to know. She told me she'd painted a dozen pictures of you from memory, trying to catch the spirit of you. She said just being with you always made her feel more alive. It was exactly

what I'd tried to tell you—only I couldn't. Why, just look at yourself this very minute!"

He led her to stand before the old mirror above the Adam console in the hall, and pointed her out to herself. But she wouldn't look. Instead, she hid a face all radiance in the obscurity of his willing shoulder murmuring, "Oh, Chris! And I thought I didn't want you!"

"You're sure you want me now?"

"For the last few hours I was—so horribly afraid I'd lost you——"

He laughed happily. "It's a good thing then you didn't know you couldn't have lost me short of shooting me through the head. When I build a thing, I build it to last quite a while."

THE END